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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈہ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 16 FEBRUARY 2025 | SUNDAY | BENGALURU | 17 SHABAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 47| Pages: 8

BeerBiceps gets threats, mom's clinic invaded

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia apologised for his remark on parents again on Saturday but said he feels scared as he and his family are receiving death threats. Allahbadia, one of the most influential podcasters with over 16 million followers across social media platforms, landed in a major controversy over his comment on parents and sex at Samay Raina's comedy show 'India's Got Latent'. On Saturday, he issued another apology on X and said he and his team are cooperating with the police and all other authorities. "I will follow due process and be available to all agencies. My remark about parents was insensitive and disrespectful. It is my moral responsibility to do better and I am genuinely sorry. "I'm watching death threats pour in from people saying that they want to kill me and hurt my family. People have invaded my mother's clinic posing as patients. I'm feeling scared and I don't know what to do. But I'm not running away. I have full faith in the police and the judicial system of India," he wrote. *—PTI*

2nd plane brings 119 Indians back from US

3rd plane with 157 deportees will land on Sunday

AMRITSAR/CHANDIGARH, 15 FEB

A plane carrying 119 illegal immigrants from the US will land at the Amritsar airport on Saturday, the second such batch of Indians to be deported by the Donald Trump administration as part of its promised crackdown on illegal migration.

The plane is expected to land at the airport around 10 pm, official sources said. Among the 119 deportees, 100 are from Punjab and Haryana.

While 67 are from Punjab, 33 are from Haryana, eight from Gujarat, three from Uttar Pradesh, two each from Goa, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, and one each is from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

The second batch of illegal Indian immigrants to deported from the United States has four women and two minors, including a six-year-old girl, the sources said, adding that most of the deportees are in the age group of 18 to 30.

A third plane carrying 157 deportees is also expected to land on Sunday, they said.

On 5 February, a US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal Indian immigrants landed at the Amritsar airport. Of the deportees, 33 each were from Haryana and Gujarat, and 30 from Punjab.

Asked whether the second batch of deportees will be in shackles like those in the first batch, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said they do not have any information on whether the deportees are handcuffed and chained.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi should have taken up the issue with US President Donald Trump and told him that India will send its own plane to bring these people back, he said.

"All eyes will be on the US aircraft which will land today in Amritsar bringing back illegal immigrants. Will the deportees be handcuffed and their legs tied with ropes? It is a test for Indian diplomacy," Congress leader P Chidambaram said.

26/11 accused's extradition to be delayed

The extradition of 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks accused Tahawwur Rana, announced by Trump during Modi's visit to the US earlier this week, is likely to be delayed, according to a NDTV.

The sources said Rana has filed a final appeal on humanitarian grounds after the US Supreme Court rejected his review petition, paving the way for his extradition, which may push back his arrival in India by a few weeks. *—PTI*

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Zelenskyy, Scholz take strong stands against US

MUNICH, 15 FEB

At the Munich Security Conference, European leaders voiced their concerns over President Donald Trump's unsettling new policies. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for the establishment of an "armed forces of Europe," citing Ukraine's three-year struggle against Russian aggression as a catalyst for this need. He emphasised that Europe must not be sidelined in peace negotiations, referencing Trump's recent dialogue with Vladimir Putin. Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz condemned Trump's Vice President JD Vance's remarks, asserting that Germany would not tolerate foreign interference in its elections, especially from far-right factions. Scholz acknowledged the necessity for increased military spending in Europe but highlighted the economic challenges hindering such commitments. While Zelenskyy and Scholz pushed for European unity and stronger defence, they grappled with the complexities of transatlantic relations under the Trump administration, suggesting a pivotal shift in Europe's approach to security and democracy. *—PTI*

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Firefighters try to douse a fire that broke out at the Maha Kumbh Mela, in Pryagaraj on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

18 Kumbh pilgrims killed in accidents

PRAYAGRAJ, 15 FEB

In a series of tragic events linked to the Maha Kumbh pilgrimage, at least 18 people have lost their lives in separate accidents across India.

On Friday night in Prayagraj, ten devotees from Chhattisgarh's Korba district were killed in a head-on collision between their Bolero car and a bus. The group was en route to the holy dip when the accident occurred. Deputy Commissioner of Police Vivek Chandra Yadav confirmed that all ten passengers in the car perished, while those aboard the bus sustained minor injuries. The deceased have been identified, and their bodies have been sent for autopsy.

In a separate incident in Firozabad, a 33-year-old man named Pawan Sharma from Rajasthan died when a bus he was on caught fire on the Lucknow-Agra Expressway. All other passengers escaped unharmed.

Additionally, four pilgrims were killed and six others injured in Gujarat's Dahod district when their tourist van, returning from the Maha Kumbh, collided with a stationary truck. The deceased included a couple and two individuals from the region.

These accidents have overshadowed the spiritual gathering, prompting condolences from local authorities and calls for improved safety measures. *—PTI*

Akhilesh says govt hiding Maha Kumbh numbers

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav claimed that approximately 60 crore people had participated in the Kumbh Mela, yet the government reported lower figures to cover up poor management. He urged the Uttar Pradesh government to extend the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. He highlighted that many elderly individuals have been unable to partake in the rituals, advocating for an extension.

M'rashtra to enact law against 'love jihad'

MUMBAI, 15 FEB

The Maharashtra Government has set up a seven-member committee headed by the state director general of police (DGP) to study the legal aspects for a new law against forced conversions and cases of "love jihad" following in the footsteps of governments in Uttar Pradesh. The committee includes secretaries of the women and child welfare, minority affairs, law and judiciary, social justice and special assistance departments, and deputy secretaries of the home department. *—PTI*

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Tennis star Sinner gets 3-month ban in doping case

LONDON, 15 FEB

Top-ranked tennis player Jannik Sinner has accepted a three-month ban in a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency over his two positive doping tests, the organization said Saturday. WADA, which was seeking to ban Sinner from the sport for at least one year, had challenged a decision last year by the International Tennis Integrity Agency not to suspend Sinner for what the ITIA judged was accidental contamination by a banned anabolic steroid last March. The 23-year-old Italian, who won the Australian Open in January, will be eligible to compete in the next Grand Slam. The French Open begins 25 May. *—PTI*

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Jaishankar meets Ukrainian counterpart in Munich

MUNICH, 15 FEB

Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held discussions with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference 2025, focusing on the resolution of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. "Good to meet FM Andrii Sybiha of Ukraine today (Friday). We discussed ongoing efforts towards resolving the Ukraine conflict and the further advancement of our bilateral cooperation," Jaishankar stated on X.

Additionally, Jaishankar participated in a panel discussion titled 'Live to Vote Another Day: Fortifying Democratic Resilience,' alongside Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, Michigan Senator Elissa Slotkin, and Warsaw's Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski. He underscored India's status as a functioning democracy, expressing a different perspective from the prevailing political pessimism and addressing issues of foreign interference. The Minister also attended a session hosted by the Ananta Aspen Centre, where he shared India's approach to global engagement and its regional strategy. Furthermore, he met with Bavarian Prime Minister Markus Soder to discuss economic and technological cooperation and had discussions with Germany's Defence Minister Boris Pistorius regarding bilateral relations and the situation in Ukraine. "I look forward to welcoming him to India," Jaishankar added in another post on X. *—PTI*

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EAM S Jaishankar during a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference 2025 in Germany **PHOTO: PTI**

Lavoo Suryaji Mamledar **PHOTO: X**

Goa ex-MLA dies as K'taka man assaults him

BELAGAVI, 15 FEB

Lavoo Suryaji Mamledar, a former legislator from Goa who represented the Ponda constituency from 2012 to 2017, was brutally beaten to death by a rickshaw driver in Belagavi on Saturday afternoon. The 69-year-old had just arrived in the city and booked a room at a hotel on Khade Bazar when his car slightly brushed against the rickshaw while navigating narrow curves.

Following a heated argument, the rickshaw driver demanded compensation for the alleged damage, which Mamledar refused. As he exited his vehicle at the hotel, the driver confronted him and struck him in the face, causing the former legislator to collapse. He was rushed to the emergency unit of the government civil hospital but was pronounced dead shortly after arrival.The rickshaw driver has been apprehended, although his identity has not yet been disclosed. Mamledar was a member of the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party and was defeated by a Congress candidate in the 2017 elections.

—Salar News

SHINDE PERFORMS POOJA AT HAJI MALANG DARGAH

MUMBAI, 15 FEB

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and top officials entered the revered Haji Malang Dargah in Thane during Urs celebrations and performed aarti at the Sufi grave site. Shinde also placed a saffron veil inscribed with OM and Hindu deities' names on the tomb.

The acts were captured on video and quickly went viral. In another video, Hindutva group were seen waving large saffron flags at the shrine. The group, clad in saffron attire, chanted religious slogans such as "Jai Shri Ram" and performed aarti puja while singing bhajans

In January 2024, Shinde said he intended to "liberate" the shrine, claiming it was originally a Hindu temple. Shinde and members of the Hindutva claim the place is the samadhi of Machindranath, a revered deity of the Nathpanthi sect.

The Dargah has been contested before. In the 1980s, Shinde's political mentor, Anand Dighe, spearheaded a campaign to reclaim it for Hindus. In 1996, he reportedly led 20,000 workers from the Shiv Sena party inside the dargah to perform a pooja). Haji Malang Dargah is dedicated to Baba Abdur Rehman Malang, an Arab missionary who arrived in India from the Middle East in the 12th century AD. *—Agencies*

GAZA PEACE DEAL CONTINUES

Palestinian prisoners are greeted after being released from Israeli prison following a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI** ***>>>More on Page 6***

TN takes possession of Jayalalithaa's assets

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

The Tamil Nadu government has officially taken possession of the seized assets belonging to late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, marking a significant development in the protracted disproportionate assets case.

The transfer occurred on Friday, a day after a Bengaluru court ordered the handover of the assets, which had previously been under the custody of Karnataka. Until now, authorities in Karnataka were in possession of an extensive collection of valuables, including 27kg and 558g of gold jewellery, 1,116 kg of silver, and documents related to 1,526 acres of land.These assets had been stored securely in the Karnataka Vidhana Soudha treasury. The transfer was carried out in the presence of court and government officials. As part of the legal proceedings, the seized items were meticulously documented and photographed, offering a rare glimpse into the wealth accumulated by the late leader. Among the images, an opulent golden crown with intricate craftsmanship stands out its reflecting the grandeur. *—PTI*

SAYS VAISHNAW

Now, train to connect B'luru & KIA soon

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the ministry will also introduce a train travel option from Kempegowda International Airport to the City. K-RIDE, a joint venture between the Centre and the State, is under construction and aims to enhance urban rail connectivity.

"We will submit a proposal to the state government. If they agree, we will depute railway officials to K-RIDE to expedite the project," the Minister said. "I conducted a detailed review this morning, and now we are proposing that the Railways will supply trains for the Bengaluru suburban rail project."

Addressing reporters, he said that people currently have access to Bengaluru airport via Metro Rail, road, and the suburban railway project managed by the State Rail Infrastructure Development Company (K-RIDE). "Apart from Metro Rail, road and K-RIDE, we are also creating a railway connectivity option to the airport," Vaishnaw said. However, he noted that a few technical challenges need to be addressed before this can be implemented and the Railway team is working on resolving them.

He emphasised the importance of suburban and metro projects for Bengaluru, a city with a population of 1.5 crore. *—PTI*

Woman found dead in B'luru, suicide suspected

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

A tragic incident unfolded in Bellandur on Saturday morning, where a 26-year-old woman, identified as Mallamma, was discovered dead at her home, and police are treating it as a suspected suicide.

The Bellandur police conducted an initial investigation and learned that Mallamma, originally from Raichur district, had been married to Basavaraju, a cab driver, for over six years, and the couple had three children together. Relatives reported that she had been uneasy about her husband's recent behaviour, confiding her worries to her parents shortly before her death. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support. *—Salar News*

CM claims BJP 'peddling lies' on Jal Jeevan Mission

He alleged Centre has failed to release funds for water supply

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has accused BJP of "betraying" the State in relation to the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), alleging that the Centre has failed to release the promised funds for water supply projects.

Targeting Union Minister of State for Jal Shakti, V. Somanna, Siddaramaiah dismissed claims made in the Lok Sabha that Karnataka had spent Rs 11,760 crore out of an allocation of Rs 28,623 crore under the JJM. In a post on social media platform 'X', Siddaramaiah said, "Union Minister Somanna is peddling lies to cover up the Union Government's deliberate sabotage of the Jal Jeevan Mission in Karnataka."

Siddaramaiah clarified that the total allocation for JJM in Karnataka was Rs 49,262 crore, of which the Centre's share was Rs 26,119 crore and the state's share was Rs 23,142 crore. He stated that of the total Rs 32,202 crore released, only Rs 11,760 crore came from the Centre, amounting to just 45% of its commitment, while Karnataka contributed Rs 20,442 crore (88.3% of its commitment). The Chief Minister emphasised that Karnataka had fully utilised every rupee released by the Centre but alleged that the government continued to block further funds.

Siddaramaiah clarified that the total allocation for JJM in Karnataka was Rs 49,262 crore *PHOTO: @SIDDARAMAIAH/X*

The Chief Minister also criticised the Centre's allocation for 2024-25, claiming it had allocated Rs 3,804 crore but released only Rs 570 crore. Despite multiple requests, no further funds had been provided, while Karnataka had released Rs 4,977 crore from its own budget, against an allocation of Rs 7,652 crore, he added.

Siddaramaiah further alleged that the Centre's budget estimates for JJM in 2024-25 were drastically reduced from Rs 70,163 crore to Rs 22,694 crore. He accused the Modi government of systematically undermining the JJM while BJP leaders like Somanna spread misinformation. *—PTI*

Bangalore Metro Commuters Association members protest against the metro fare hike at City's Freedom Park on Saturday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Vaishnaw blames State over metro fare

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

Amid public outcry over the steep hike in Metro rail fare in Bengaluru, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw shifted the blame to the state government, saying the fare fixation committee for the Metro Rail is not based in Delhi.

He said the Chief Minister should be asked about the hike in Metro rail fare and not the central government.

"The Price Fixation Committee is not from Delhi. The price fixation proposal has to be prepared by the State government." Vaishnaw said, addressing a press conference. "The state government knows the ground reality of the city and they should be in the prime decision making process for every metro project. So please ask this question to the state Chief Minister." According to Vaishnaw, the state government is responsible for everything related to Metro Rail and they should be asked about the hike in fare. A week ago, BMRCL announced a fare hike of 50 percent, citing increased operational costs and the need to repay loans. *—PTI*

Cops offer ₹5 L reward for leads on ATM robbery

BIDAR' 15 FEB

In a bid to apprehend two armed robbers who executed a brazen daytime heist in Bidar, the Karnataka Police have announced a substantial reward of ₹5 lakh for credible information. On January 16, the thieves attacked a cash delivery vehicle, shooting two security personnel and making off with ₹93 lakh. The suspects, identified as Aman Kumar and Alok Kumar alias Ashutosh from Bihar's Vaishali district, are known for a string of similar crimes across several states, including a recent ATM robbery in Uttar Pradesh. With police forces from Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana on high alert, authorities are urging the public to assist in tracking the criminals. Contact information for reporting any leads has been provided by the police, inviting citizens to contribute to the investigation and potentially earn the reward for their assistance. *—Salar News*

Govt workers strike in Bidar

BIDAR, 15 FEB

In a significant escalation, Village Administration Officers (VAOs) from Chitguppa Taluk in Bidar District embarked on the second phase of their indefinite strike on 10 February, 2025. The protest, spearheaded by the Karnataka State Village Administration Officers' Association under the leadership of Taluk Chief Secretary Vitthala Yalaba, is taking place outside the Chitguppa Tehsildar's office and is driven by the demand to address 23 specific grievances.

The key demands of the striking officers include a 50 lakh compensation for the families of officers who lose their lives on duty, as well as well-equipped office facilities, suitable furniture, mobile phones, CUG SIM cards, and laptops. They are also seeking a risk allowance of 3,000 and an increase in travel allowances from 500 to 5,000. Moreover, the officers are calling for state-level recognition of their seniority. This protest marks the second time the VAOs have taken to the streets, following unfulfilled commitments made by the government during their previous strike. With plans to intensify their protest if their demands continue to be ignored, the VAOs have garnered support from local farmers' associations underlining the seriousness of their situation. The ongoing strike is severely disrupting public services, leading to significant inconvenience for citizens. Students preparing for the Karnataka Common Entrance Test (CET) on 16 and 17 April are particularly affected, as they are unable to obtain reservation and income certificates due to the strike. Delays in issuing birth and death certificates, as well as documentation for farmers, are compounding the issues. *—Salar News*

The strike is disrupting public services *PHOTO: SALAR*

'INFRA IS LACKING'

SC judge flays M'rashtra's judiciary, praises K'taka

MUMBAI, 15 FEB

Supreme Court Justice Abhay Oka has expressed his discontent with the inadequate judiciary infrastructure in Maharashtra, contrasting it with the more robust support provided by neighbouring Karnataka. Speaking at the Ashok Desai Memorial Lecture on 15 February, Justice Oka highlighted that civil court judges in Pune lack even separate chambers, stating, "We struggle to get infrastructure from Maharashtra government. It is very very difficult to get infrastructure from Maharashtra government."

In contrast, he praised Karnataka for its proactive approach, noting that the Kalaburagi bench resembles "a five-star hotel." Justice Oka also addressed broader issues in the criminal justice system, advocating for a debate on capital punishment, which he personally opposes.

He underscored that bail should be the norm, not imprisonment, and pointed to the societal pressures influencing police actions and public perceptions of guilt. Criticising social media trials, he emphasised the need for judges to rely on evidence rather than popular opinion.

Justice Revati Mohite Dere of the Bombay High Court, speaking at the same event, called attention to the skewed judge-to-population ratio and the numerous challenges facing the criminal justice system, including trial delays and overcrowded jails. *—PTI*

Man beaten to death over land dispute in B'luru

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

A 38-year-old JCB driver, Venugopal Reddy, was reportedly beaten to death by his relatives following a dispute over land in Vittasandra. According to police reports, a father-son duo, close relatives of Reddy, confronted him on Friday night to discuss a long-standing property disagreement. The two wanted to sell the land, but Reddy opposed the idea, leading to a heated exchange that escalated into violence. Armed with machetes and iron rods, the pair allegedly attacked Reddy before fleeing the scene. Neighbours alerted the police, who arrived at the location, examined the area, and moved the body to St John's Hospital for an autopsy. A case has been registered, and a manhunt is underway for the suspects. *—Salar News*

Yaduveer flays govt for delaying TDR issuance

MYSURU, 15 FEB

Yaduveer Krishnadutta Chamaraja Wadiyar, a member of parliament and scion of the Mysore royal family, has strongly condemned the Karnataka government for its continued delay in issuing Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to his family. This follows the acquisition of a section of Bangalore Palace Grounds for road widening, despite a Supreme Court directive instructing the government to issue the TDR.

Addressing reporters, Yaduveer alleged that the state government has been targeting the royal family, particularly since his election as MP for the Mysuru constituency. He highlighted that a Supreme Court bench, comprising Justices MM Sundresh and Aravind Kumar, warned the government's representatives that failure to comply with previous court orders would have consequences for the relevant officials.

Yaduveer expressed concerns over the Karnataka government's lack of adherence to the Supreme Court ruling, noting an ordinance enacted on January 29, 2025, which seemingly reserved the right not to acquire disputed Palace Grounds land. He insisted that royal family members, like all citizens, deserve equal treatment under the law and called for respect for court orders.

Reflecting on a protracted history of legal disputes dating back to 1996, Yaduveer affirmed his family's commitment to pursue legal avenues to safeguard their properties. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Call to exclude affluent women from scheme

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

The integrity of the Gruha Lakshmi scheme may be compromised if financially stable women continue to receive its benefits, warned G Krishnappa, Chairman of the BBMP Guarantee Schemes Implementation Committee (GSIC).

During a review meeting at the Bommanahalli constituency office on Saturday, Krishnappa underscored the importance of effectively carrying out the state's guarantee schemes to ensure that aid reaches those genuinely in need.

Gruha Lakshmi, one of five guarantees introduced by the Congress-led government, provides a monthly payment of Rs 2,000 to women heads of households who are married, divorced, or destitute, and over 18 years of age.

Krishnappa announced ongoing efforts to identify ineligible families, particularly those who are income tax payers or government employees in possession of Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards. Such cards will be upgraded to Above Poverty Line (APL) status automatically.

Laxmi Hebbalkar *PHOTO: X*

He appealed to financially secure women to voluntarily return the financial assistance, ensuring that resources are allocated to those who truly require support. "If every woman qualifies, regardless of her financial situation, many from low-income groups will lose out on these vital benefits," he cautioned.

Krishnappa also noted the international recognition received by Karnataka's guarantee schemes and urged officials to address any issues swiftly, ensuring seamless assistance for beneficiaries. *—Salar News*

'State needs 25 TMC of Godavari-Cauvery water'

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

JD(S) supremo HD Deve Gowda on Saturday said Karnataka should receive 25 TMC of water under the Godavari-Krishna-Cauvery irrigation project and vowed to fight for this cause alongside all political parties.

"I have no hesitation in joining Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, and Congress MPs in this fight. When it comes to Karnataka's interests, BJP, Congress and JD(S) must set aside their differences and work together." the former PM told reporters.

"Irrigation is not a political issue, and it is unfair to make it one. In the past, Siddaramaiah visited my house to discuss irrigation matters. At that time, we were not even on speaking terms yet I stood by him. I hold no grudges. Politics must not interfere in irrigation issues," Gowda said.

Deve Gowda said that he had raised this issue in Parliament and had appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to increase Karnataka's share of water under the Godavari-Krishna-Cauvery project.

"I have asked in Parliament how 15.91 TMC of water from the Godavari river will be diverted to the Ghataprabha river. Where exactly will the Godavari water be linked to the Cauvery river? The project details are unclear." *—PTI*

FIR filed against ABVP activists for protest

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

An FIR has been lodged against 16 members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) for conducting an unsanctioned protest outside Nadaprabhu Kempegowda (Majestic) Metro Station in the city. The right-wing student group staged the demonstration to express their discontent with the state government over the recent increase in Namma Metro ticket fares. According to police reports, the protestors brandished placards and shouted slogans, but were denied entry into the metro station. The Cottonpet police station has registered the FIR, invoking provisions concerning unlawful assembly. *—Salar News*

2 women drown at Muthathi pilgrim centre

MYSURU, 15 FEB

Two women lost their lives in a drowning incident while bathing in the Cauvery River at the Muthathi pilgrim centre in Malavalli taluk, Mandya district, on Saturday. The victims have been identified as Shobha (23) and Nadiya (19), both residents of Ganalua village in the Kanakapura taluk of Ramanagara district. They had visited the temple alongside 50 other villagers when the tragedy struck as they entered the river to swim. Unfortunately, they were caught in whirlpools and swept away. The Halaguru Police responded rapidly, enlisting the help of expert swimmers to locate and retrieve the bodies. continue. *—Salar News*

200 FIRMS LOOK FOR WORKERS

Over 3,000 attend job fair in City, 150 get on-the-spot offers

BENGALURU, 15 FEB:

A Mega Job Fair held at Khuddus Saheb Eidgah Ground on Saturday attracted over 3,000 job seekers, with more than 200 private companies conducting interviews. Organised by the Presidency Foundation, the event provided fresh graduates and job aspirants a vital platform to explore employment opportunities.

At least 150 candidates received offer letters on the spot, while many others were shortlisted for further rounds or are awaiting confirmation for jobs and internships. For many, the fair was a crucial opportunity in an uncertain job market.

"A job fair like this helps fresh graduates like me find internships and job openings without much hassle," Ameen Khan, a Business Management student told Salar News.

Several candidates travelled from neighbouring districts in search of better prospects. Ramesh Gowda, an MBA graduate from Tumakuru, said, "There are very few companies hiring in my hometown. This job fair gave me access to multiple companies in one place."

Commerce graduate Fatima Banu from Ramanagara also found the event beneficial, meeting recruiters from five different companies. "I hope at least one of them selects me," she said.

The fair, organised in association with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Karnataka Skill Development Corporation (KSDC), Karnataka State Minorities Commission (KSMC), and the Department of Employment and Training, Karnataka Government, included over 50 stalls where candidates were guided to opportunities based on their qualifications.

Job aspirants at the Mega Job Fair organised by the Karnataka State Minorities Commission and the Presidency Foundation at Quddus Sahib Eidgah Ground, Millers Road, Bengaluru on Saturday. *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

However, some attendees remained cautious about their chances. Harish Kumar, a BBA student, expressed concerns, saying, "I've attended three interviews so far. The recruiters say they will get back to me, but I don't know if that will actually happen." Despite such uncertainties, several candidates secured job confirmations.Priyanka Sharma, a commerce graduate, received an offer from a BPO company, while Naveen R, a diploma holder in mechanical engineering, was selected for a manufacturing role.

The event was inaugurated by BZ Zameer Ahmed, Minister for Housing, Waqf, and Minority Affairs, along with the founders of the Presidency Group of Institutions, Salman Ahmed and Suhael Ahmed. *—Salar News*

BJP accuses WB govt of failing in women's safety

KOLKATA, 15 FEB

Senior BJP leader Amit Malviya has condemned the Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal government for its inability to safeguard women, citing recent incidents in Sandeshkhali and RG Kar Hospital. Malviya claimed Banerjee's administration is keen on promoting women's welfare through schemes like 'Lakshmir Bhandar' while neglecting severe atrocities against women. He highlighted the tragic case involving a woman medic, accusing the Chief Minister of shielding the culprits. Additionally, Malviya criticised corruption within the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) and asserted that the BJP would bring good governance and safety for women if elected in 2026. *—PTI*

President rule in Manipur shows govt's failure: Gogoi

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi has condemned the recent imposition of President's rule in Manipur as indicative of a "collective failure" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and BJP leadership in the Northeast. President's rule was enacted following the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh amid ongoing ethnic violence that erupted in May 2023, leading to more than 250 deaths and displacing thousands. Gogoi expressed concern on social media, noting the absence of a sustainable peace strategy for the region. He described the situation as a reflection of the disarray within the state BJP and asserted that the people of Manipur and India deserve a government capable of more effective governance and reconciliation. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

T'gana: Centre won't accept Muslims in BCs list

HYDERABAD, 15 FEB

The Centre will not accept the Telangana government's move to include Muslims in the Backward Classes category, Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar said. "The Centre will not accept the inclusion of 10 per cent of Muslims in the BC category. We oppose religion-based reservations," Kumar said. His comments hold significance as the Telangana government recently announced plans to pass a bill in the Assembly to increase the reservation for OBCs to 42 per cent. "Muslims are already receiving benefits under the Economically Weaker Sections category," he said. He said Muslims would win the seats reserved for BCs in the upcoming Telangana local body polls, as "their voting is one-sided." *—PTI*

SP trade wing chief held to prevent unrest: Cops

LUCKNOW, 15 FEB

A day after arresting the Samajwadi Party's trade wing president, the Lucknow Police on Saturday said the arrest was made to prevent the possibility of "unrest and violence" through social media posts. The Lucknow Police on X said, "To prevent the strong possibility of continuously creating negativity, unrest and violence in the society through objectionable posts on social media, Manish Jagan Aggarwal was arrested and further legal action was taken against him." The SP on Friday accused the Lucknow Police of "forcibly" taking its trade wing president Jagan into custody. "If any objectionable post has been made by Jagan which leads to unrest and violence, then Lucknow Police should share that post or else stop exploiting opposition leaders with baseless things," the party said on X. *—PTI*

Sheesh Mahal under probe for 'lavish' renovations

AAP Supremo Kejri is accused of breaching building regulations

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

According to the complaint, the renovation cost millions: including Rs77 lakh on a television, Rs 50 lakh on a silk carpet **PHOTO: ANI**

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has ordered a thorough investigation into alleged irregularities surrounding the renovation of Arvind Kejriwal's official residence, commonly referred to as "Sheesh Mahal" by the opposition BJP.

The probe follows complaints from BJP leader Vijender Gupta, who has accused Kejriwal of breaching building regulations to construct a luxury home on 6, Flagstaff Road, which spans 40,000 square yards (8 acres). Gupta claims that several government properties, including previous residences for senior officials and judges, were demolished and merged into Kejriwal's new home without adhering to zoning laws or obtaining the necessary approvals.

Gupta's first complaint was lodged with the CVC on 14 October 2024, and after initial reviews, the CVC registered the matter on 16 October. A factual report from the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) confirmed the alleged violations on 5 December. Following this, the CVC instructed the CPWD to expand its investigation.

In a complaint dated 21 October 2024, Gupta highlighted what he described as "extravagant spending" on renovations, with reported expenditures totalling millions: including Rs77 lakh on a television, Rs 50 lakh on a silk carpet, and Rs42 lakh on brass railings. The CVC sought further clarification from the CPWD, which confirmed the allegations of excessive spending on 24 December 2024.

3 AAP councillors join BJP

Three AAP councilors switched over to the BJP on Saturday, boosting its chances of victory in the upcoming MCD mayoral poll.

City BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said Delhi will have a "triple engine" government -- at the Centre, assembly and municipal level -- at the right time to develop it as the capital of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision under a 'Viksit Bharat". *—PTI*

Modi not from Backward Class by birth: Revanth

HYDERABAD, 15 FEB

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy has asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not belong to the backward classes (BC) by birth, labelling him "anti-BC by mentality." During a presentation on the caste survey conducted by the Congress government in Telangana, Reddy stated that Modi, who he claims belongs to a "forward caste," legally converted to BC status after becoming Chief Minister of Gujarat.

"Though his (Modi's) certificates may indicate he is BC, his mentality is anti-BC," Reddy remarked, questioning why a general census assessing BC population was not conducted in 2021. He alleged that the BJP and the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) are attempting to undermine the cast survey data for their own interests.

Reddy emphasised the significance of the caste survey data for backward communities, suggesting it could be used to advocate for increased reservations. He further claimed that there are no inaccuracies in the data, as it was submitted by citizens. The Chief Minister accused the Central government of neglecting Telangana, stating that while other states receive significant funding, Telangana is shortchanged, receiving only 42 paisa for every rupee paid in taxes. Reddy vowed to take action to secure Telangana's rights, asserting, "Modi ji, you are taking 58 paisa of our funds.". In a reference to the BJP finding fault with the inclusion of Muslims in the BCs, he said Muslims are being given four per cent reservation under BC category which was also endorsed by the Supreme Court. His attack on the BRS and BJP came as the regional party had alleged that the Congress is backstabbing the BCs with the caste survey showing a decline in the population of backward classes. *—PTI*

Counting of votes Chhattisgarh Urban Body elections 2025, in Raipur **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP wins all 10 mayor posts in Chhattisgarh

RAIPUR, 15 FEB

After its resounding victories in assembly and Lok Sabha elections in Chhattisgarh, the BJP was set to win elections to a majority of civic bodies in the state on Saturday as counting of votes began in the morning.

Riding high on welfare schemes and poll promises fulfilled by the Vishnu Deo Sai government, the saffron party won all ten mayor posts.

Counting was still underway.

Elections to 173 urban bodies including 10 municipal corporations, 49 municipal councils and 114 Nagar Panchayats were held on 11 February.

As per the trends provided by the state election officials, the BJP won mayoral posts in all 10 municipal corporations, and chairperson's posts in 35 municipal councils and 81 nagar panchayats.

Opposition Congress won the chairperson's post in eight municipal councils and 22 nagar panchayats, while Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) won chairperson's post in one municipal council and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in one nagar panchayat.

Independent candidates won chairperson's post in five municipal councils and ten nagar panchayats.

BJP has won or was leading in most of the municipal wards. *—PTI*

IMMIGRANTS ROW

Amritsar not deportation centre, says Mann

CHANDIGARH, 15 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has vehemently opposed the central government's decision to land US flights carrying illegal Indian immigrants at Amritsar airport, labelling it an unfair move that could tarnish the city's reputation. On Saturday night, a second US flight is scheduled to arrive, bringing 119 deportees, following a previous landing on 5 February which saw 104 individuals returned.

During his visit to the airport, Mann expressed his frustration, stating, "Do not make our holy city a deport centre."

He argued that the Indian government has multiple airbases available and should redirect these flights elsewhere instead of targeting Amritsar.

In addressing the media, Mann highlighted the logistical arrangements made by his administration to ensure the safe return of the deportees from Punjab to their hometowns. Those from other states will be flown to Delhi on Sunday morning for onward travel to their destinations.

Among the deportees on the upcoming flight, the majority come from Punjab and Haryana, with 67 originating from Punjab alone.

Mann raised concerns about the stigma associated with these deportations, questioning the rationale behind selecting Amritsar as the landing point instead of the national capital.

He accused the Central government of attempting to "defame Punjab and Punjabis" as part of a conspiracy. *—PTI*

Mann politicising deportees, says BJP

CHANDIGARH, 15 FEB

BJP on Saturday hit back at Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on the issue of deportees, accusing the AAP leader of playing politics over the matter.

The second batch of 119 illegal immigrants from the US is expected to land at the Amritsar airport late on Saturday evening.

On Friday, Mann accused the Centre of trying to defame Punjab as part of a conspiracy by choosing the Amritsar airport for the landing of the aircraft.

Hitting back at Mann, BJP leader Tarun Chugh said on Saturday, "Bhagwant Mann sahab, people of Punjab want to know how the innocent youths went out, why they had to go, who were those who spoiled their lives.

Why they had to go adopting illegal routes, who sent them, and who were the fraudulent agents who spoiled their lives."

"The youths were forced to sell their land, houses.

> **The manner in which the illegal Indian immigrants were sent back from America in handcuffs and shackles is extremely shameful and a blot on humanity**
>
> -Uma Bharti, BJP leader

Rather than catching the culprits and acting against those who spoiled the lives of these youths, the 'AAP-da' party leader is doing politics over the issue," Chugh, who is also BJP's general secretary, said. BJP's national spokesperson R P Singh also took a dig at Mann, and told him to stop politicising the issue. "Amritsar is the closest international airport for flights entering India from the US. That's why the plane carrying illegal immigrants is landing there. Stop politicising the issue and promoting conspiracy theories due to your lack of knowledge.@BhagwantMann," Singh said in a post on X. *—PTI*

Stalin accuses Palaniswami of 'voice dubbing' for BJP

CHENNAI, 15 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday accused AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami of "voice dubbing" for the BJP and said he proved correct the DMK's allegation that there is a secret alliance between the two parties.

Answering questions in his "Ungalil Oruvan" series (One among you), the DMK president, when asked on opinions expressed by DMK's allies and if there had been any "contradictions,"he said he considered their views only as advice. Difference of opinion is quite natural, be it a family, an office or other places and expression of opinion is an identity of democratic ties.

DMK's allies, the CPI(M), VCK, had sought transfer of the Vengaivayal case on the mixing of human faeces in an overhead water tank in Pudukottai distrct to the CBI.

He described the Central government's decision on imposition of President's rule in Manipur as belated. *—PTI*

INDIA NEEDS CLEAR VISION TO PRODUCE NEW TECH: RAGA

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

PHOTO: ANI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has emphasised the necessity for India to establish a robust production base in technology, rather than relying on "empty words" from the Prime Minister. In a post on X (formerly Twitter), Gandhi pointed out that despite having the talent, India must strategise to enhance its competitive edge, particularly in drone technology, which he believes is pivotal for modern warfare.

Citing China's advancements in drone production, Gandhi stated, "Drones have revolutionised warfare... But they are not just one technology — they are bottom-up innovations produced by a strong industrial system." He accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of failing to grasp the significance of this shift, noting that while Modi delivers "teleprompter" speeches on artificial intelligence, other nations are advancing in key technological innovations. He also remarked that drones are reshaping military tactics and the industrial landscape, reducing the significance of traditional armaments. He lamented that India is lagging in controlling the essential components necessary for drone production, such as electric motors and batteries. *—PTI*

'DEMOCARCY HAS ITS SUCCESSES'

EAM slams West's democratic hypocrisy at Munich meet

MUNICH, 15 FEB

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during Ananta Aspen Centre Session at Munich Security Conference (MSC) 2025, in Munich **PHOTO: PTI**

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has directed pointed criticism towards Western nations during a panel discussion on democratic resilience at the Munich Security Conference. He accused them of perceiving democracy as a "Western characteristic" and failing to implement the same values abroad that they uphold at home.

Jaishankar argued that if the West genuinely desires democracy to flourish, it must acknowledge and support successful democratic models in the Global South. He remarked, "There was a time when the West encouraged non-democratic forces in the Global South. It still does. Everything you value at home, you don't practice abroad."

Highlighting India's commitment to democracy, he stated, "For all the challenges we face, we have stayed true to the democratic model, which makes us unique in our region." Jaishankar countered US Senator Elissa Slotkin's assertion that democracy "doesn't put food on the table," stressing that India provides nutritional support to 800 million people, thus illustrating democracy's tangible benefits in certain contexts. He also expressed optimism about democracy's potential, highlighting high voter turnout in Indian elections. "We just had a state election, and two-thirds of eligible voters participate. This shows that, despite challenges, democracy has its successes," he concluded. *—PTI*

Democratic India able to feed 800M people: EAM

MUNICH, 15 FEB

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar challenged an American senator who said that democracy "doesn't put food on the table" telling her that in India it does.

Jaishankar was apparently referring to the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana at a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference, where he countered US Senator Elissa Slotkin. "Senator, you said that democracy doesn't put food on your table. Actually... in my part of the world, it does. Today, since we are a democratic society, we give nutrition support, and food to 800 million people," Jaishankar said on Friday. "That is a matter of how healthy they are and how full their stomachs are. So, the point I want to make is that different parts of the world are going through different conversations. Please do not assume that this is a kind of universal phenomenon, it is not," he said.

- Jaishankar was apparently referring to the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana at the Munich Security Conference, where he countered US Senator

"There are parts where it is working well. Maybe there are parts where it's not," he said. "I think people need to have honest conversations about why it's not." *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

SC to hear pleas on Places of Worship Act on 17 Feb

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

The Supreme Court of India is set to hear a series of petitions regarding the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, on February 17. This Act, which preserves the religious character of places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947, excludes the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute from its scope. The court will consider challenges to the validity of certain provisions, particularly Sections 3 and 4, which relate to the conversion of worship sites and judicial jurisdiction. The hearing follows a December directive restraining lower courts from entertaining new suits concerning religious places. Various Muslim groups have opposed petitions to reclaim historical sites, citing communal harmony and the law's constitutional validity. *—PTI*

Bengali singer Mukhopadhyay dies at 82

KOLKATA, 15 FEB

Renowned Bengali singer and songwriter Pratul Mukhopadhyay has passed away at the age of 82 after a prolonged illness, according to a senior official from the West Bengal health department. Known for his impactful songs addressing social issues, Mukhopadhyay was noted for performing without musical accompaniment. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited him at SSKM Hospital shortly before his death and expressed her heartfelt condolences to his family and countless fans. Mukhopadhyay, celebrated for songs like "Ami Banglay Gan Gai" and "Dinga Bhashao Sagore," had been struggling with pancreatic ailments and other age-related health problems. *—PTI*

Security forces arrest 9 militants in Imphal

IMPHAL, 15 FEB

Security forces have detained nine militants from various banned outfits across Imphal East and Thoubal districts, according to police reports. On Friday, four members of the Kangleipak Communist Party (Noyon), linked to kidnapping and extortion, were apprehended in Chingdompok, Thoubal. In a separate operation, four militants from KCP (PWG) were arrested for similar extortion activities in Khabeisoi, Imphal East. Additionally, an operative of UNLF (Pambei) was taken into custody from Nungoi Awang Leikai, with a .32 pistol confiscated from him. Furthermore, security forces seized an arsenal including two single barrel guns, a modified sniper rifle, five hand grenades, four IEDs, and a China-made drone at Hiyanglam Natekhong Thongjin in Kakching district. *—PTI*

AISA says 17 students suspended over Jamia protest

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

The Left-affiliated All India Students' Association has called for a boycott of classes at Jamia Millia Islamia on Monday, claiming 17 students have been suspended by the university for protesting against the disciplinary action against two PhD scholars. The university is yet to issue a response to the claims about the suspensions of students. The controversy began after the university suspended two PhD scholars for allegedly leading an unauthorised protest in December last year. The administration defended its actions, stating that protests disrupted academic activities and resulted in property damage, including vandalizing the central canteen and breaking the gate of the security advisor's office. However, student activists argued that the administration was attempting to stifle dissent. *—PTI*

After UP, Maharashtra to get law against 'love jihad'

Govt sets up panel to study law on forced conversions

MUMBAI, 15 FEB

In 2023, Fadnavis said the state government was thinking about introducing a law to curb "love jihad" but will study similar legislations in other states before taking a decision *PHOTO: ANI*

The Maharashtra Government has set up a seven-member committee headed by the state director general of police (DGP) to study the legal aspects for a new law against forced conversions and cases of "love jihad" following in the footsteps of governments in Uttar Pradesh.

The committee includes secretaries of the women and child welfare, minority affairs, law and judiciary, social justice and special assistance departments, and deputy secretaries of the home department.

As per a Government Resolution (GR) issued late on Friday, the committee will study the prevailing situation in the state and suggest steps to tackle the complaints of "love jihad" and forced conversions.

The committee will also look at legal aspects and the laws framed in other states.

Accordingly, it will recommend legislation to prevent forced conversions and instances of "love jihad".

Love jihad is a term used by Right-wing activists and outfits to allege a conspiracy by Muslim men to convert Hindu women to Islam through marriage.

"Various organisations in the State and some citizens submitted representations regarding enacting a law to prevent love jihad and fraudulent or forced conversions. Some States in India have also enacted laws to prevent love jihad and fraudulent or forced conversions," the government order read.

The ruling Mahayuti had brought up the issue of "love jihad" last year.

Fadnavis had long called for a law against 'love jihad' in Maharashtra. Before the elections last year, Fadnavis said there were over one lakh complaints against forced conversations, which showed a deliberate 'love jihad' conspiracy where Hindu women were being lured into marriage by Muslim men using fake identities.

In 2023, Fadnavis said the state government was thinking about introducing a law to curb "love jihad" but will study similar legislations in other states before taking a decision. "Many cases have come up of girls getting married and converting. There is demand from all corners to make a law against this," he said at the time. *—PTI*

LANDSLIDE REHABILITATION

Centre sanctions Rs 529.50 crore loan for Wayanad

T'PURAM, 15 FEB

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, 15 Feb – The Centre has approved a loan of Rs 529.50 crore for the rehabilitation of landslide-affected areas in Wayanad, Kerala, under its 'Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2024-25'. However, the loan comes with stringent conditions, including a requirement that the funds be utilised by 31 March, a stipulation state Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal has called a "huge practical problem."

The loan must be forwarded to implementing agencies within 10 working days, or the state will incur interest charges based on the open market borrowing rates from the previous year. Balagopal expressed concerns that the state, having requested both a loan and a grant, had received a loan under conditions that would be difficult to meet within the tight deadline.

Opposition Leader VD Satheesan also criticised the loan, describing it as "mocking" the people of Wayanad, who have "lost their lives and livelihoods." He called the Centre's decision to offer a loan instead of a special financial package "unjust" and a violation of Kerala's constitutional rights, stating the state deserved Rs 2,000 crore for rehabilitation. Satheesan warned of strong agitation if the Centre's stance was not corrected.

Despite these criticisms, the state government plans to proceed with the first phase of rehabilitation, including constructing a township, once necessary clearances are received. However, the strict utilisation conditions remain a point of contention.

The state must also seek Centre approval for any project changes and ensure funds are not diverted. *—PTI*

GBS is a rare condition in which a person's immune system attacks the peripheral nerves *PHOTO: PTI*

Maharashtra's GBS tally rises to 207

PUNE, 15 FEB

The tally of suspected and confirmed Gullain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) cases in Maharashtra has reached 207 after two cases were detected, a health official said.

With the addition of the two new cases on Friday, the tally of confirmed cases stands at 180, of which 20 are on ventilator support, the official said.

Meanwhile, though the official death toll remained unchanged at eight as per the state health department, a suspected fatality from the ailment was reported from Kolhapur.

A district health official said a 60-year-old woman from Changid tehsil there died on February 13.

"She suffered paralysis of the lower limbs and was first admitted in a hospital in Changid and then taken to neighbouring Karnataka. She was brought back to a hospital in Kolhapur on February 11, where she died two days later," the official said.

GBS is a rare condition in which a person's immune system attacks the peripheral nerves, resulting in muscle weakness, loss of sensation in the legs and/or arms, and problems swallowing or breathing. *—PTI*

JUNIORS TORTURED WITH COMPASS

Kottyam college ragging: Principal, prof suspended

KOTTAYAM, 15 FEB

The housekeeper-cum-security of the hostel was also ordered to be removed immediately *PHOTO: PTI*

The principal and an assistant professor of the Government College of Nursing, Kottayam have been suspended in connection with the case of brutal ragging incident in a students' hostel that triggered widespread public outcry in the state.

The principal Sulekha A T, and assistant professor/assistant warden-in-charge of the students hostel Ajeesh P Mani of the college were suspended pending enquiry for allegedly failing to check ragging and effectively intervene in the matter, a statement issued by the Health Minister's office Friday late night said.

The housekeeper-cum-security of the hostel was also ordered to be removed immediately, it said.

The action has been taken following an inquiry conducted by the Director of Medical Education as per the instructions of Health Minister Veena George, the statement added.

The disturbing visuals of the brutal ragging of a junior student at the college surfaced on Thursday, showing the victim being tied to a cot and repeatedly pierced with a compass.

According to the footage obtained by the Gandhinagar police, the victim was stripped half-naked and subjected to horrifying acts, including having dumbbells placed on his private parts after being tied to a cot and having facial cream poured into his mouth.

The abuse took place in the boys' hostel, targeting first-year nursing students.

Five third-year students Samuel Johnson (20), Rahul Raj (22), Jeev (18), Rijil Jith (20) and Vivek (21) were arrested in the case. They were arrested after a case was registered under the Prohibition of Ragging Act. *—PTI*

3 students held in Kannur for ragging

KANNUR, 15 FEB

Three plus two students of a government-aided Higher Secondary School here have been arrested for allegedly assaulting a junior student as part of ragging.

The five students allegedly assaulted a junior for not respecting the seniors and not obeying their 'orders' on 12 February.

Kolavallur Police said they had registered a case on charges of assault against five students and three of them have been arrested.

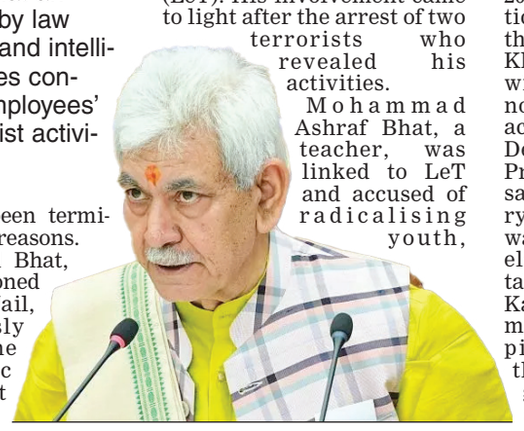
The 17-year-old boy, a plus one student at the school, who sustained a fracture on his hand is currently under treatment.

The accused were suspended after the school authorities launched an inquiry into the incident. *—PTI*

3 J&K govt workers fired for terror links

JAMMU, 15 FEB

- Citing Article 311 (2) (c) of the Constitution, officials stated that an investigation by law enforcement and intelligence services confirmed the employees' links to terrorist activities.



Jammu and Kashmir's Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, has dismissed three government employees, including a jailed policeman, for alleged ties to terrorism. The dismissed individuals are police constable Firdous Ahmad Bhat, school teacher Mohammad Ashraf Bhat, and forest department orderly Nisar Ahmad Khan.

Citing Article 311 (2) (c) of the Constitution, officials stated that an investigation by law enforcement and intelligence services confirmed the employees' links to terrorist activities. Since assuming office, over 70 employees in the Union Territory have been terminated for similar reasons.

Firdous Ahmad Bhat, currently imprisoned in Kot Bhalwal Jail, was previously part of the Electronic Surveillance Unit in the Jammu and Kashmir Police but was found to be working for the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). His involvement came to light after the arrest of two terrorists who revealed his activities.

Mohammad Ashraf Bhat, a teacher, was linked to LeT and accused of radicalising youth, while Nisar Ahmad Khan had been associated with the Hizbul Mujahideen since 2000 when he provided logistical support for an attack that killed a former minister. Khan's continued affiliations with terrorism had been noted despite his earlier acquittal in court. People's Democratic Party (PDP) President Mehbooba Mufti said "arbitrary and summary" dismissal of employees was continuing even after an elected government has taken office in Jammu and Kashmir. The former chief minister said the people had pinned hopes on the National Conference government, expecting some relief. *—PTI*

CBSE CLASS BOARD EXAMS COMMENCE

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) commenced its board examinations for Class 10 and Class 12 today, with more than 42 lakh students registered to sit the exams at over 7,800 centres both within India and internationally.

According to board officials, approximately 24.12 lakh candidates will undertake the Class 10 examinations in 84 subjects, while over 17.88 lakh students will be taking their Class 12 exams across 120 subjects. The examinations are being conducted at 7,842 centres throughout India and 26 centres abroad.

On the first day, Class 10 students tackled English (Communicative) and English (Language and Literature), while their Class 12 counterparts sat for the Entrepreneurship examination. The Class 10 exams are slated to conclude on 18th March, while Class 12 exams will wrap up on 4th April.

In an effort to combat examination-related stress, the CBSE has initiated an annual counselling service, staffed by a team of 66 trained professionals including principals, counsellors, special educators, and psychologists. *—PTI*

Andhra woman chops son over perverted behaviour

CUMBUM, 15 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

- Devi's relatives allegedly helped her in killing Prasad.

A 57-year-old woman in Prakasam district, frustrated with her son's misconduct, allegedly killed him and with the assistance of relatives dismembered his body into five pieces, police said on Saturday.

Prakasam Superintendent of Police, AR Damodar said K Lakshmi Devi, 57, allegedly murdered her son, K Shyam Prasad, 35, a cleaner, on 13 February.

Devi's relatives allegedly helped her in killing Prasad.

"Unable to bear her son's perverted and indecent behaviour, she (Lakshmi Devi) killed him," Damodar told PTI, adding that Prasad had also behaved indecently with his aunts and other relatives in Bengaluru, Khammam, and Hyderabad.

Prasad, who was unmarried, had also allegedly attempted to rape his maternal aunts in Hyderabad and Narasaraopeta, police said.

According to the police, he was murdered using an axe or a sharp weapon. Following the murder, his body was cut into five pieces, stuffed into three sacks, and dumped in the Nakalagandi canal in Cumbum village. *—PTI*

COMEDY GONE WRONG

Allahbadia's phone off; Raina gets time to appear before cops

MUMBAI, 15 FEB

Mumbai police have reported difficulty in locating podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia, whose phone remains switched off amid an investigation into his controversial comments on the now-deleted YouTube show, "India's Got Latent". Comedian Samay Raina has been granted an extension until 10 March to record his statement regarding the incident.

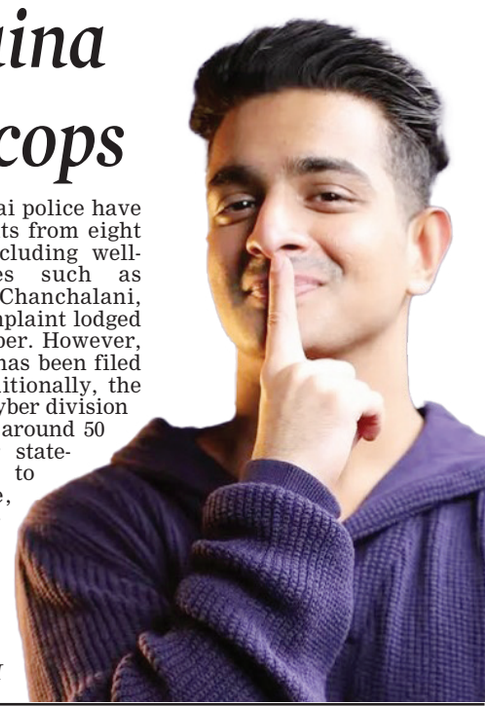
Allahbadia's inappropriate remarks concerning parents and sexuality have provoked widespread outrage, resulting in numerous complaints. According to police, the Khar division has been unable to make contact with Allahbadia, a prominent figure on YouTube known for his channel "BeerBiceps".

Raina's legal representative recently approached senior police officials asking for additional time to facilitate Raina's appearance, stating that the comedian is currently in the United States. His request was approved, and Raina must now report by the new deadline.

Previously, Allahbadia had requested that his statement be recorded at his home, but this was declined by the police.

On Friday, authorities visited his Versova residence but found it locked.

So far, Mumbai police have taken statements from eight individuals, including well-known figures such as Makhija and Chanchalani, following a complaint lodged by a BJP member. However, no formal FIR has been filed as of yet. Additionally, the Maharashtra Cyber division has summoned around 50 individuals for statements related to the case, including participants from the show, with actor Raghu Ram having recently given his testimony. *—PTI*



A REMEMBRANCE

Women's Memorial March at Vancouver, Canada. The annual event, held on Valentine's day, honours the missing and killed indigenous women and girls across the Americas
PHOTO: PTI

India's clash with Maoism and its legacy

Security forces killed at least 31 Maoist rebels last weekend in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh. Two security personnel were killed and two others wounded in the skirmish.

The 9 February encounter, in the forested areas of Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, was one of the deadliest since the government ramped up efforts to crush the long-running insurgency between the Maoist rebels, known as Naxalites, and government forces. A month earlier, security forces shot dead at least 14 Naxalites, including a top commander.

"Another mighty blow to Naxalism," said Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who has set a deadline of March 2026 to defeat the rebels.

The Naxalites — named after the district where their armed campaign began in 1967 — were inspired by Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong.

They follow a form of communism propogated by Mao, and have waged a guerrilla-style insurgency against the government, particularly in central and eastern India.

Nearly 60 years of conflict has led to periodic clashes and thousands of casualties on both sides.

The Naxal movement began in 1967 in Naxalbari, a small village in West Bengal on the east coast, as a Maoist-inspired rebellion advocating for land rights and social justice for marginalized tribal communities. The leaders of the peasant movement demanded land redistribution for oppressed farmers.

They believed violent upheaval was necessary against perceived oppressors, particularly landlords and class enemies.

The situation today is more complex, argues Malini Subramaniam, who has reported extensively from Chhattisgarh's Baster district, considered the heartland of the Naxalite movement.

"The Naxalites or the Maoists may have a larger agenda of overthrowing the Republic of India, but for the Adivasis it is their land and forest that they wish to protect."

The region's wealth of natural resources, including minerals such as coal, bauxite and iron ore, are a focal point in the conflict
PHOTO: ANI

The insurgency is concentrated in certain states, primarily in the mineral-rich "red corridor" region, which comprises the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, and parts of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

The region's wealth of natural resources, its dense forests and challenging terrain have made it a focal point for protracted conflict. The region is also home to a large Adivasi population with their livelihoods intricately tied with the land and the forest products.

However, with the presence of minerals such as coal, bauxite and iron ore in the region, indigenous people bear the brunt of displacement due to mining, industrial projects, and deforestation.

Lawyer Shalini Gera, who has worked in Bastar, told DW that "the insurgency in Bastar is driven by the deep suspicion that Adivasi communities harbor towards outsiders, and their fear that these outsiders will 'colonize' them, rule over them and steal their natural resources."

The local populations further say they have been largely excluded from the benefits of development, battling high poverty and mortality rates and low literacy.

Journalist Subramaniam believes the government is not interested in a political solution because "it is convenient for them to militarily suppress any democratic resistance from local villagers and civil society to stop them from going ahead with mining the region."

Caught between the warring factions, tens of thousands have been forced to abandon their homes, seeking refuge in government-run camps. Women and children are particularly vulnerable, facing violence and exploitation.

Lawyer Gera said while there is "violence and coercion from both sides," it should not be assumed that people are totally devoid of agency.

"The Bastar villagers are political, sentient beings, and many of them are also choosing to support the insurgents or the government forces because of their ideologies, or the visions of future that they project."

At the same time, Gera said, "the state is now trying to push a vision of itself as more benevolent and inclusive, and is succeeding in drawing some people toward it." —*DW News*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساڈہ

AI is harming our critical thinking, says Microsoft

There is only so much thinking most of us can do in our heads. Try dividing 16,951 by 67 without reaching for a pen and paper. Or a calculator. Try doing the weekly shopping without a list on the back of last week's receipt. Or on your phone. By relying on these devices to help make our lives easier, are we making ourselves smarter or dumber? Have we traded efficiency gains for inching ever closer to idiocy as a species?

This question is especially important to consider with regard to generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology such as ChatGPT, an AI chatbot owned by tech company OpenAI, which at the time of writing is used by 300 million people each week.

According to a recent paper by a team of researchers from Microsoft and Carnegie Mellon University in the United States, the answer might be yes. But there's more to the story.

The researchers assessed how users perceive the effect of generative AI on their own critical thinking.

One way we do this is by judging our own thinking processes against established norms and methods of good reasoning. These norms include values such as precision, clarity, accuracy, breadth, depth, relevance, significance and cogency of arguments.

Other factors that can affect quality of thinking include the influence of our existing world views, cognitive biases, and reliance on incomplete or inaccurate mental models.

Research published earlier this year revealed "a significant negative correlation between frequent AI tool usage and critical thinking abilities".

The new study further explores this idea. It surveyed 319 knowledge workers such as healthcare practitioners, educators and engineers who discussed 936 tasks they conducted with the help of generative AI. Interestingly, the study found users consider themselves to use critical thinking less in the execution of the task, than in providing oversight at the verification and editing stages.

In high-stakes work environments, the desire to produce high-quality work combined with fear of reprisals serve as powerful motivators for users to engage their critical thinking in reviewing the outputs of AI.

But overall, participants believe the increases in efficiency more than compensate for the effort expended in providing such oversight.

The study found people who had higher confidence in AI generally displayed less critical thinking, while people with higher confidence in themselves tended to display more critical thinking.

This suggests generative AI does not harm one's critical thinking – provided one has it to begin with.

Problematically, the study relied too much on self-reporting, which can be subject to a range of biases and interpretation issues. Putting this aside, critical thinking was defined by users as "setting clear goals, refining prompts, and assessing generated content to meet specific criteria and standards".

"Criteria and standards" here refer more to the purposes of the task than to the purposes of critical thinking. For example, an output meets the criteria if it "complies with their queries", and the standards if the "generated artefact is functional" for the workplace.

This raises the question of whether the study was really measuring critical thinking at all. Implicit in the new study is the idea that exercising critical thinking at the oversight stage is at least better than an unreflective over-reliance on generative AI.

The authors suggested that generative AI developers add features to trigger users' critical oversight.

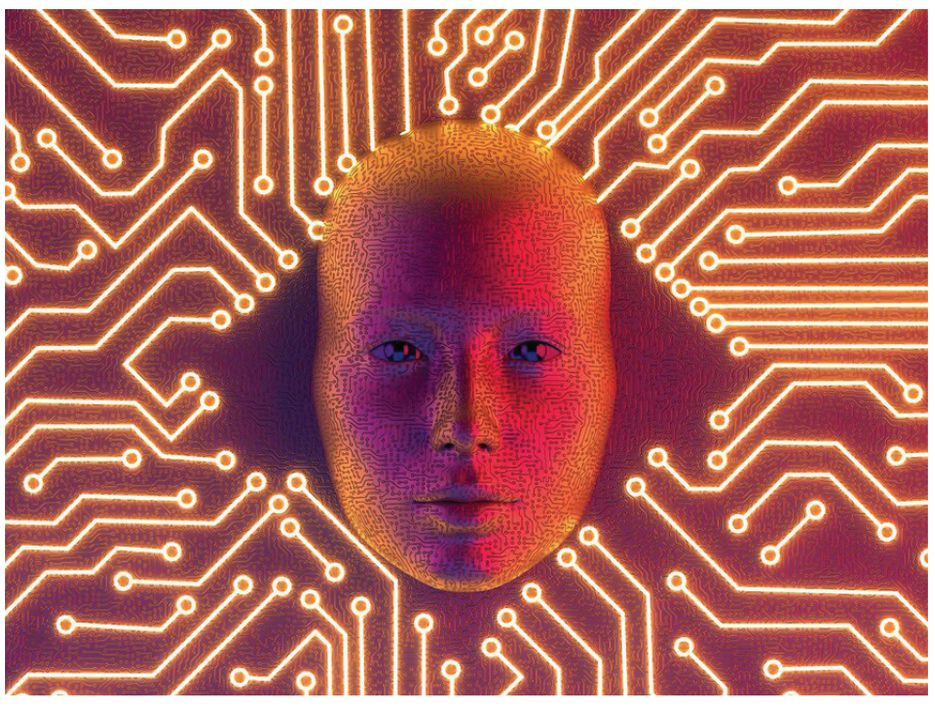
Critical thinking is needed at every stage before and while using AI – when formulating questions and hypotheses to be tested, and when interrogating outputs for bias and accuracy.

The only way to ensure generative AI does not harm your critical thinking is to become a critical thinker before you use it.

Becoming a critical thinker requires identifying and challenging unstated assumptions behind claims and evaluating diverse perspectives. It also requires practicing systematic and methodical reasoning and reasoning collaboratively to test your ideas and thinking with others.

Chalk and chalkboards made us better at mathematics. Can generative AI make us better at critical thinking? Maybe – if we are careful, we might be able to use generative AI to challenge ourselves and augment our critical thinking.

In the meantime, there are always steps we can take to improve our critical thinking instead of letting an AI do the thinking for us.—*PTI*



People who had high confidence in generative AI displayed less critical thinking
PHOTO: X

Trump's tariffs, the World Trade Organisation and their impact

American President Donald Trump has announced imposing reciprocal tariffs on its major trading partners including China that levy higher import duties on goods shipped from the United States.

He has already announced a 25 per cent duty on steel and aluminium imports, which will come into effect from 12 March.

While announcing the new tariff policy, the president has also spoken about how India is "right at the top of the pack" when it comes to tariffs.

With all these countries being members of the global trade body World Trade Organisation (WTO), the decisions of the US may challenge the WTO principles.

The 166-member Geneva-based WTO is a multilateral body which formulates rules for global trade and adjudicates disputes between the countries. Its main objective is to promote smooth, predictable and free flow of goods.

Both India and the US have been members since 1995.

The nations have signed multiple agreements governing trade in goods, services, and intellectual property. These pacts set rules and guidelines for international trade.

One of the key principles of the WTO is tariff binding, which ensures predictability and stability in global trade.

Bound tariffs are the maximum tariff rates that a WTO member commits to under its Schedule of Concessions. These commitments are legally binding, meaning a country cannot impose tariffs above this level without renegotiation.

Applied tariffs are the actual tariff rates a country levies on imports. These can be lower than the bound rate but cannot exceed it without violating WTO rules.

If a member country imposes a tariff higher than its bound commitment, it violates Article II of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) 1994, which says that members must not impose duties or charges exceeding those listed in their schedules and they cannot impose any other duties or charges that are not specified in their schedules.

Affected countries can file a complaint with the WTO Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) against high duties.

The first step to resolve the dispute under DSB rules are bilateral consultations. If consultations fail, the complainant country may be allowed to impose retaliatory tariffs or other trade countermeasures after receiving approval from the WTO.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump in the White House. The WTO allows developing countries, like India, to impose higher tariffs on richer nations
PHOTO: PTI

A WTO member can increase bound tariff only by negotiating with affected countries under GATT Article XXVIII (Modification of Schedules), where it must offer compensatory concessions or by invoking emergency provisions like safeguards, or national security exceptions in specific cases.

The US under the previous Trump regime, had introduced additional tariffs of 25 per cent on steel and 10 per cent on aluminium products, on grounds of 'national security' under section 232 of its Trade Act. It had cited threats to domestic steel production capacity. However, the WTO has ruled against this measure in multiple cases.

India had also imposed retaliatory duties on 28 American goods.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that the WTO dispute panel stated that national security exceptions cannot be used arbitrarily and must be linked to real security concerns during war or emergencies.

According to the GTRI, America refused to comply with the WTO ruling, arguing that it has the sovereign right to determine its national security policies. It has also blocked the WTO Appellate Body, preventing an appeal resolution.

Developing countries like India maintain high import duties primarily to protect domestic industries, generate revenue, and support economic development.

These nations often rely on tariffs to shield their emerging sectors from foreign competition, promote self-sufficiency, and manage trade imbalances.

On the other hand, developed countries like the US have lower tariffs because their industries are already globally competitive, and they benefit from open markets that allow their businesses to access foreign consumers with minimal trade barriers.

Historically, according to the GTRI, when the WTO was established in 1995, developed nations agreed to let developing countries retain higher tariffs in exchange for commitments on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), services trade liberalization, and agricultural rules that primarily favoured wealthier nations.

The WTO agreements contain special provisions which give developing countries special rights and allow other members to treat them more favourably For example India can take more time to reduce its tariffs and export subsidies than more rich nations.

RV Anuradha, Partner, Clarus Law Associates said India has a right to fight the 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminium and the threat of reciprocal tariffs at the WTO.

"But my advice would be to not expect a bilateral deal to work magic and be firm on what will be truly beneficial for us. At a minimum there should be suspension of the enhanced steel and aluminum tariffs, and the reciprocal tariffs. If we do not get this, then we need to seriously consider retaliatory tariffs, and also keep the option of a WTO dispute open," she said.

Anuradha suggested that India needs to work with other WTO. "There is absolutely no substitute for an effective rules based multilateral order where we have the strength of shared interests of developing countries. Bilateral deals will only be a power-play." —*PTI*

Scholz defends democracy amid Trump chaos

His comments come after Vance criticised EU leaders on handling democratic values

MUNICH, 15 FEB

German Chancellor **Olaf Scholz** delivered a robust defence of his government's approach to far-right politics, asserting that Germany will not tolerate any interference in its democracy. His comments came after US Vice President JD Vance criticised European leaders for their handling of democratic values during the ongoing Munich Security Conference.

Scholz's remarks are particularly significant as they coincide with crucial elections in Germany, where the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party currently holds a concerning second place in the polls. With just over a week before the elections, Scholz's strong stance was clearly aimed at countering growing far-right influences.

- Scholz's remarks are particularly significant as they coincide with crucial elections in Germany, where the far-right (AfD) party currently holds a concerning second place in the polls

During the conference, European leaders were eager to respond to recent shifts in US foreign policy, particularly concerning democracy and the conflict in Ukraine. Vance's speech, which emphasised the necessity for Europe to uphold its foundational values, received a lukewarm reception among attendees. He expressed particular concern over what he perceives as a retreat from these values

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

within Europe, warning of the potential for diminished public support if changes are not implemented swiftly.

Earlier, Vance met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who reiterated Ukraine's demand for security assurances before engaging in negotiations with Russia. Zelenskyy indicated that he would only meet Russian President Vladimir Putin after a preliminary plan is established with the US.

The backdrop of the conference also included President Donald Trump's recent phone call with Putin, hinting at impending peace negotiations. This has stirred apprehensions among European allies regarding the US commitment to supporting Ukraine's defence against ongoing Russian aggression. The conference continues with contributions from various foreign ministers and NATO leaders, discussing pressing security issues faced by Europe and its allies. *—PTI*

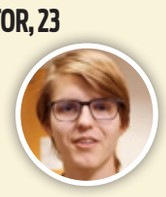
MEET THE YOUNG POWER PLAYERS BEHIND ELON MUSK'S DOGE

AKASH BOBBA, 22
He is a UCA Berklee MET graduate. He interned at Meta & Palantir. He currently works at the Office of Personnel Management.

EDWARD CORISTINE, 19
Coristine briefly worked at Neuralink. He now works at State Diplomatic Technology & the Department of Homeland Security.

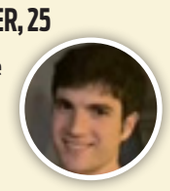
MARKO ELEZ, 25
Elez is an x-SpaceX & X employee. He resigned over racist post links but was rehired after support from Trump, VP JD Vance & Musk.

LUKE FARRITOR, 23
Farritor is a former SpaceX intern. He now works as Executive Engineer at the Office of the Secretary of Health & Human Services.



GAUTIER COLE KILLIAN, 24
Killian is a McGill University alum. He now works at Environmental Protection Agency.

GAVIN KLIGER, 25
Kilger is a special adviser at the Office of Personnel Management & Director for Information Technology.



ETHAN SHAOTRAN, 22
Shaotran is a Harvard student. He was the runner-up in Musk's AI company hackathon. He owns Energize AI.

PHOTO: PTI

US shifts immigrants to Venezuela after court ruling

EL PASO, 15 FEB

In a controversial move, three immigrants who secured a restraining order to prevent their transfer to Guantanamo Bay have been deported to Venezuela. Court documents revealed that the men were flown back on Monday, just a day after a federal judge issued a temporary block against their transfer. Their lawyers argue that the US government's unfounded claims of gang affiliations expose them to significant danger upon their return to Venezuela. Attorney Jessica Myers Vosburgh highlighted the serious risks to the men's lives, citing fears related to the notorious Tren de Aragua gang. Amidst Venezuela's ongoing political and economic crisis, millions have fled the country, seeking refuge elsewhere in Latin America or the US. *—PTI*

Missouri abortions resume after judge blocks restrictions

KANSAS CITY, 15 FEB

Abortion services in Missouri are set to resume following a judge's ruling that blocked restrictive regulations impacting providers. Kansas City Circuit Judge Jerri Zhang's decision comes after voters enshrined abortion rights in the state constitution last November, although the amendment did not outright legalise the procedure. Key restrictions included stringent licensing requirements for abortion facilities, which Planned Parenthood argued were medically unnecessary and discriminatory. Margot Riphagen, head of Planned Parenthood Great Rivers, stated the ruling acknowledges that the state's regulations were politically motivated barriers to care. It is a temporary measure pending further litigation, while advocates prepare to restore services, promising greater access to abortion care across the Midwest. *—PTI*

Dutch drug kingpin killed in Mexico after faking death

MEXICO, 15 FEB

Marco Ebben, a 32-year-old convicted drug kingpin from the Netherlands, was shot dead in a shootout in Atizapan de Zaragoza, just 25km from Mexico City. Considered one of Europe's most wanted criminals, Ebben was killed on Thursday in a car park, with authorities confirming his identity shortly after. He had previously faked his own death and had been evading arrest since being sentenced in absentia to over seven years in prison in October 2020 for smuggling drugs from Brazil to the Netherlands. Ebben was listed by Europol as a top fugitive. Earlier this year, he asserted to a Dutch broadcaster that he was uninvolved in a series of explosions targeting a plumber in Vlaardingen. *—Agencies*

6.4 magnitude quake strikes southern Siberia

MOSCOW, 15 FEB

A 6.4-magnitude earthquake jolted Russia's Altai Republic in southern Siberia on Saturday morning, as reported by Russian seismologists. The quake struck at 8.48am. local time (01:48 GMT), with tremors felt in surrounding regions, according to Interfax. Andrei Turchak, the regional governor, confirmed that there were no reported casualties, but a "high-alert regime" has been instituted, leading to the cancellation of public events and potential issues with water supply near the epicentre. Initial assessments suggested only minor damage in certain areas, with Turchak urging residents to trust official information and remain calm amidst swirling social media claims of extensive destruction. *—PTI*

End funds for school that require Covid vaccines: Trump

WASHINGTON, 15 FEB

Schools, colleges and states that require students to be immunised against Covid-19 may be at risk of losing federal money under a White House order signed Friday by President Donald Trump.

The order is expected to have little national impact because Covid-19 vaccine mandates have mostly been dropped at schools and colleges across the United States, and many states have passed legislation forbidding such mandates.

The order directs the Education Department and Health and Human Services to create a plan to end vaccine mandates for Covid-19.

It aims to fulfil a campaign promise from Trump, who often said he would "not give one penny to any school that has a vaccine mandate."

Meanwhile, in a recent directive, the Pentagon has instructed military services to contact personnel who were dismissed for refusing the Covid-19 vaccine. *—PTI*

Trump taps Usha Vance as trustee of Kennedy Centre

Donald Trump has appointed Usha Vance, wife of Senator JD Vance, to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Trump recently announced plans to overhaul the center's leadership by dismissing several members, arguing they "do not share our vision for a Golden Age in Arts and Culture." He also criticised past programming choices, vowing to end drag performances at the Centre.

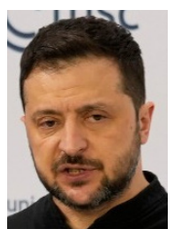
Judges halt Trump's order against gender-affirming care

In a significant legal development, two federal judges have temporarily blocked President Donald Trump's executive order that restricts federal support for gender-affirming care for transgender youth under 19. US District Court judges Lauren King and Brendan Hurson issued restraining orders following lawsuits from Democratic attorneys general in Washington, Oregon, and Minnesota.

Ukraine may not survival without US aid: Zelenskyy

KYIV, 15 FEB

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has expressed grave concerns about his nation's ability to withstand ongoing Russian aggression without backing from the United States. In an interview with NBC News, Zelenskyy stated, "We will have a low chance—low chance to survive without support of the United States," highlighting the difficulties Ukraine faces amid the conflict.



Volodymyr Zelenskyy
PHOTO: X

Zelenskyy also criticised Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions, asserting that Putin is not genuinely interested in ending the war but rather seeks a temporary ceasefire that could allow for the easing of sanctions and a chance for Russian military regrouping. The Ukrainian leader voiced fears that without US military assistance, Ukraine may find itself increasingly vulnerable to further Russian offensives.

The situation escalated when US President Donald Trump announced plans to open negotiations with Putin, raising concerns over the future of support for Ukraine. He signalled a meeting with Putin to discuss a truce, while simultaneously suggesting that Ukraine's NATO ambitions may not be practical.

As Zelenskyy engaged with Vice President JD Vance at the Munich Security Conference, he reiterated Ukraine's desire for peace coupled with "real security guarantees." Zelenskyy also said that time has come for the creation of an "armed forces of Europe" and says his country's fight against Russia has proved that a foundation for it already exists. *—Agencies*

28 DEAD, 4 MISSING IN BOLIVIAN RAINS

LA PAZ, 15 FEB

The death toll due to heavy rains in Bolivia since November last year has risen to 28, said Juan Carlos Calvimontes, vice civil defence minister, on Friday.

The rains have affected eight of the country's nine Administrative divisions. "We are talking about 83 municipalities affected, and I am sure that within a week many of them will declare themselves in disaster," the official told a press conference.

27 municipalities have declared themselves in a state of emergency, of which 22 belong to La Paz, the Administrative division hardest hit by the climate. The deaths were caused by floods in the departments of Chuquisaca (south), La Paz (west), Tarija (south), Cochabamba (centre), Santa Cruz (east), and Potosi (southwest). In addition, four people remain missing, three of them in the north of La Paz and one in Chuquisaca.

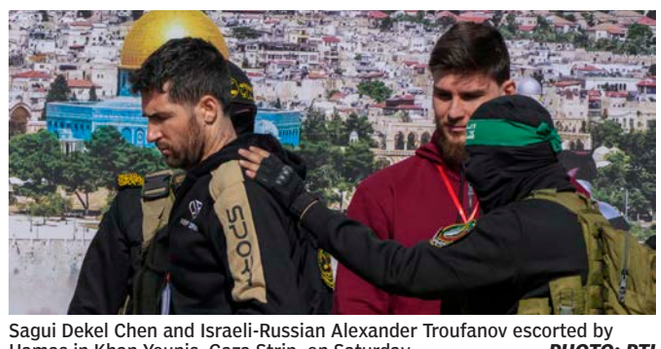
National Meteorology and Hydrology Service predicted that the rains will persist, possibly extending until March and April. *—ANI*

3 Israeli hostages released after dispute threatened ceasefire

KHAN YOUNIS, 15 FEB

Hamas militants released three Israeli hostages on Saturday, handing them over to the Red Cross in a highly publicised exchange amid a frail ceasefire deal. The hostages—Iair Horn, 46; Sagui Dekel Chen, 36; and Alexander "Sasha" Troufanov, 29—were abducted on 7 October, 2023, during a deadly attack that marked the beginning of the ongoing conflict.

The Red Cross stated that the hostages would receive medical treatment and be reunited with their families after being paraded before a crowd in southern Gaza. Unlike previous releases, these men appeared better cared for, contrasting sharply with the three hostages who were released last week, who looked emaciated. The hostage release forms part of a broader truce deal requiring Israel to free hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. On Saturday, 369 Palestinians were slated for release from Israeli prisons, including prominent militant Ahmed Barghouti, serving a life sentence for directing suicide bombings during the Second Intifada. *—PTI*



Sagui Dekel Chen and Israeli-Russian Alexander Troufanov escorted by Hamas in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, on Saturday
PHOTO: PTI

Rebels enter Congo's Bukavu amid conflict

GOMA, 15 FEB

Rwanda-backed M23 rebels have advanced into Bukavu, eastern Congo's second-largest city, prompting chaos and panic among residents. Reports indicate that the rebels entered the Kazingu and Bagira zones of Bukavu, which is home to approximately 1.3 million people, with gunfire being heard in various parts of the city.

The ongoing conflict has left 350,000 internally displaced individuals lacking shelter, as the UN reports rising violence between government forces and the rebels. The M23 rebels have also claimed control of Kavumu airport, located about 30kms from Bukavu, following a series of territorial gains, including the earlier capture of Goma's international airport in January. *—PTI*

Yunus, Musk plan to bring Starlink to Bangladesh

DHAKA, 15 FEB

Bangladesh's Chief Adviser, Professor Muhammad Yunus on Friday said that he has discussed with Tesla CEO Elon Musk on a potential collaboration to launch Starlink satellite internet service in Bangladesh.

Yunus on X said, "Had great meeting with @elonmusk. We agreed to work together. Hoping to launch Starlink in Bangladesh soon together with him."

Yunus on Thursday held an extensive video discussion with Musk, the founder of SpaceX, Tesla, and X to make further progress in introducing Starlink satellite to enhance internet service in Bangladesh.

Yunus also extended an invitation to Elon Musk to visit Bangladesh.

Yunus said Starlink would be an extension of Grameen Bank and Grameen phone pioneering of connnecting village women and young people to the world. *—ANI*

PHOTO: X

23 DEAD IN NIGERIA ACCIDENT

KANO, 15 FEB

At least 23 people lost their lives, and 48 others sustained varying degrees of injuries in a road crash in Kano, Nigeria.

Eyewitnesses told The Guardian that the accident, which occurred on Thursday night, involved a heavily loaded truck carrying goods and passengers. The truck, with an unidentified registration number, was heading toward Maiduguri Road when it suddenly crashed into a section of the bridge. *—Agencies*

Sunita, Wilmore to return from space on 19 March

WASHINGTON DC, 15 FEB

NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore, who have been stranded in space for the past eight months due to an extended spaceflight mission, are set to return home next month.

In an exclusive interview with CNN, Williams and Wilmore, currently aboard the International Space Station (ISS), confirmed that the Crew-10 mission is scheduled to launch from Earth on March 12 and will bring them back on 19 March.

The Crew-10 mission will transport a four-member team consisting of NASA astronauts Anne McClain and Nichole Ayers, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Takuya Onishi, and Roscosmos cosmonaut Kirill Peskov to the ISS for a six-month mission.

PHOTO: X

Once Crew-10 arrives, Williams and Wilmore will take part in a week-long handover process before a new Space Station Commander assumes control. At present, Sunita Williams serves as the commander of the orbital laboratory.

Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore flew to the International Space Station's Boeing Starliner on 5 June last year and have been stuck since due to technical problems with the spacecraft. *—Agencies*

'OPENAI IS NOT FOR SALE'

OpenAI board rejects Musk's $97.B proposal

SAN FRANCISCO, 15 FEB

OpenAI says its board of directors has unanimously rejected a USD97.4 billion takeover bid by Elon Musk.

"OpenAI is not for sale, and the board has unanimously rejected Mr. Musk's latest attempt to disrupt his competition," said a statement Friday from Bret Taylor, chair of OpenAI's board.

OpenAI attorney William Savitt in a letter to Musk's attorney Friday said the proposal "is not in the best interests of OAI's mission and is rejected."

Musk, an early OpenAI investor, began a legal offensive against the ChatGPT-maker nearly a year ago, suing for breach of contract over what he said was the betrayal of its founding aims as a non-profit he helped found a decade ago.

- Musk has alleged in the lawsuit that the companies are violating the terms of his foundational contributions to the charity. He had invested about USD45 million in the startup from its founding until 2018, his lawyer has said

Then on Monday, while that case was still awaiting a key ruling, Musk and his own AI startup, xAI, and a group of investment firms announced a bid to buy the nonprofit that controls OpenAI. Musk in a court filing Wednesday expanded on the proposal to acquire the nonprofit's controlling stake in the for-profit OpenAI subsidiary.

PHOTO: X

Savitt's letter Friday said that filing added "new material conditions to the proposal. As a result of that filing, it is now apparent that your clients' much-publicized bid' is in fact not a bid at all." In any event, "even as first presented," the board has unanimously rejected it, Savitt said.

Musk has alleged in the lawsuit that the companies are violating the terms of his foundational contributions to the charity. Musk had invested about USD45 million in the startup from its founding until 2018, his lawyer has said.

He escalated the legal dispute late last year, adding new claims and defendants, including OpenAI's business partner Microsoft, and asking for a court order that would halt OpenAI's plans to more fully convert itself into a for-profit business. *—PTI*

India, Myanmar discuss border trade via roads

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

India and Myanmar have discussed the importance of resuming border trade through roads and agreed to take steps on this issue, an official statement said on Sunday. The issue was discussed during a meeting between Myanmar's Deputy Commerce Minister U Minn Minn and Minister of State of Commerce and Industry Jitin Prasada here on 14 February. They discussed possibilities to increase cooperation in areas such as pharmaceuticals, pulses, petroleum products and greater use of the recently launched Rupee-Kyat trade settlement mechanism. India is the fifth-largest trading partner of Myanmar. The bilateral trade stood at USD 1.74 billion in 2023-24 against USD 1.76 billion in 2022-23. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

Dr Agarwal's Health clocks ₹28.24 cr profit after taxes

CHENNAI, 15 FEB

Dr Agarwal's Health Care Ltd has logged a consolidated profit after tax of Rs 28.24 crore for the October-December 2024 quarter, the company said. The city-headquartered eye care provider had registered a profit after tax of Rs 22.59 crore during the corresponding quarter of last financial year. The company had registered a profit after tax of Rs 67.79 crore for the nine month period ending 31 December, 2024 as compared to a profit after tax of Rs 53.73 crore registered in the year ago period. The total income on a consolidated basis for the October-December 2024 quarter surged to Rs 443.43 crore, from Rs 344.69 crore. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

RIL Infrastructure Q3 net loss widens to ₹3,298.35 cr

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

Reliance Infrastructure Ltd has reported widening of consolidated net loss to Rs 3,298.35 crore in the December quarter. It had clocked a net loss of Rs 421.17 crore in the year-ago period, the company said in an exchange filing. The company's total income, however, rose to Rs 5,129.07 crore from Rs 4,717.09 crore in the same period a year ago. Its expenses declined to Rs 4,963.23 crore from Rs 5,068.71 crore in the third quarter of the previous fiscal. Reliance Infrastructure is engaged in the business of providing engineering and construction services for power, roads, metro rail, and other infrastructure sectors. *—PTI*

Mahindra Lifespace to raise ₹1,500 cr via rights issue

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

Real estate company Mahindra Lifespace Developers plans to raise up to Rs 1,500 crore through issue of shares to eligible shareholders for reducing its debt as well as funding further growth. The board of Mahindra Lifespaces Developers Ltd has approved the fund raise of up to Rs 1,500 crore through rights issue to the eligible shareholders of the company. The proceeds will be utilised to pare down the company's existing debt and support its future growth plans, according to a regulatory filing on 13 February. Mahindra Lifespace is the real estate and infrastructure development business of the Mahindra Group. Recently, Mahindra Lifespace reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 22.47 crore for the quarter ended December 2024. *—PTI*

FPIs took out Rs 1L cr in last 1.5 months from mkts

Global uncertainties, geopolitics are key reasons behind this trend

MUMBAI, 15 FEB

With this, the total net selling in February has reached Rs 21,272 crore so far PHOTO: X

Foreign investors have been aggressively selling Indian equities since the beginning of 2025, with total outflows now approaching the Rs 1 lakh crore mark.

According to data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL), foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have offloaded equities worth Rs 99,299 crore in just one and a half months of the year.

The selling pressure has remained strong in February as well. In the week from 10 February to 14 February alone, FPIs sold equities worth Rs 13,930.48 crore.

With this, the total net selling in February has reached Rs 21,272 crore so far. This follows a massive sell-off in January when FPIs withdrew Rs 78,027 crore from the Indian stock market.

Last year in December the net investment by FPIs in Indian equities stood positive, with a net investment of Rs 15,446 crore. The year 2024 marked a positive ending, but the net buying value in Indian equities by FPIs drastically reduced, declining to Rs 427 crore.

The continuous selling spree by foreign investors has raised concerns among market participants. A combination of global uncertainties, rising US bond yields, and concerns over geopolitical tensions could be some of the key reasons behind this selling trend.

This persistent selling is largely attributed to the return of Donald Trump to the political stage in the United States, which has boosted investor confidence in the US economy. The positive sentiment surrounding Trump's leadership and his efforts to improve the average American's life have made the US a more attractive destination for investments.

Additionally, outflows from emerging markets, including India, have been rising as investors shift towards safer assets.

The country experienced a drastic drop in Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) inflows in 2024, with net investments falling by 99 per cent. *—ANI*

The case has been transferred to the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai city police PHOTO: X

New India Co-op Bank GM arrested in ₹122 cr scam

MUMBAI, 15 FEB

The Mumbai police on Saturday arrested Hitesh Mehta, General Manager and Head of Accounts of the New India Cooperative Bank, for allegedly misappropriating Rs 122 crore from the bank, officials said.

Mehta was placed under arrest by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the city police after being questioned for more than three hours, an official said.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday superseded the cooperative bank's board for a year and appointed an administrator to manage its affairs. A day prior to that, it imposed several restrictions on the lender, including on withdrawal of funds by depositors, citing supervisory concerns emanating from the recent material developments in the bank, and to protect the interest of its depositors.

The police official said, "Acting Chief Executive Officer of the bank, Devarshi Ghosh, on Friday approached the Dadar police station in central Mumbai and lodged a complaint of misappropriation of funds."

Considering the scope of the investigation, the case was then transferred to the EOW, he said, adding that

the agency has launched a probe.

Most of the 28 branches of this cooperative bank are located in the Mumbai megapolis, and it also has two branches at Surat in neighbouring Gujarat and one in Pune.

The RBI's action against the bank triggered panic among its customers, who thronged its branches since morning on Friday hoping to access their savings, but were denied entry into the premises. *—PTI*

Meta's project Waterworth to connect India via undersea cable

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

Meta has announced 'Project Waterworth', which will reach five major continents and span over 50,000km PHOTO: X

Social media major Meta on Saturday tagged India as one of its largest markets to be connected with the company's world's longest undersea cable "Project Waterworth" which is expected to be operational by the end of this decade.

Meta has announced "Project Waterworth" which will reach five major continents and span over 50,000 kilometers -- longer than the earth's circumference.

The project was part of the US-India Joint Leaders' Statement that was released on February 13 following the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to US.

The investment assumes significance as telecom operators have been demanding big techs including Meta to contribute towards building network infrastructure to decongest the data traffic load and improve customer's experience.

According to the US-India joint statement, India intends to invest in maintenance, repair and financing of undersea cables in the Indian Ocean, using trusted vendors.

Meta in a blog on Project Waterworth said that the company is deploying first-of-its-kind routing, maximizing the cable laid in deep water -- at depths up to 7,000 metres -- and using enhanced burial techniques in high-risk fault areas, such as shallow waters near the coast, to avoid damage from ship anchors and other hazards.

The company said the new, multi-billion dollar investment will connect five continents, enhancing the scale and reliability of the global digital highways that power Meta's apps and services, and will be ready for service at the end of the decade. *—PTI*

INDIA'S INFLATION TO AVERAGE AT 4.8% IN 2025

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

India's inflation is expected to average around 4.8 per cent in 2025.

According to a report by Centrum Institutional Research, the recent decline in consumer price inflation (CPI) for January could provide the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) with enough room for another 25 basis points (bps) rate cut in the near future.

"We expect inflation to average 4.8 per cent in FY25. This sharp slowdown in inflation will provide RBI enough room for another 25bps rate cut," the report said.

According to the report, last month's drop in inflation was primarily due to a fall in food prices, especially vegetables. As fresh vegetables and pulses enter the market, inflationary pressures are likely to ease further.

The report suggested that this trend will help bring overall inflation to an average of 4.8 per cent for 2025. *—ANI*

UN climate chief calls India 'solar superpower'

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

UN climate chief Simon Stiell has called India a "solar superpower" and urged it to develop an ambitious climate plan covering its entire economy, saying that an even stronger embrace of the global clean energy boom will supercharge its economic rise.

Simon Stiell PHOTO: X

Stiell, who is in India to attend the ET Global Business Summit, lauded India's efforts to mitigate climate change, saying that while some governments only talk, "India delivers".

Stiell said India has an opportunity that only a few countries have: "To realise ambitious plans to deploy hundreds more gigawatts of renewable energy capacity. To lead a new wave of green industrialisation, developing, scaling, and exporting vital technologies."

He said the world's fifth-largest economy is well-positioned to reap the benefits of ambitious, economy-wide climate plans. "Key among them is Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's leadership in prioritising LiFE–unleashing the power of institutions, communities, and individuals to protect the environment and economy." *—PTI*

'$500B target, pact need to boost India, US exports'

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

A target to take bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 and plans to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement will help India boost its exports to the US, exporters say.

The focus on technology, defence, and green energy will particularly benefit India's export sectors and enhance global competitiveness, exporters said.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President Ashwani Kumar underscored the importance of enhancing bilateral trade by eliminating barriers and streamlining processes.

International trade expert and Hi-Tech Gears Chairman Deep Kapuria said that the USD 500 billion bilateral trade target is an important outcome of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's high-level visit to Washington.

In 2023, the US and India bilateral trade in goods and services stood at USD 190.08 billion (USD 123.89 goods and USD 66.19 services trade). In that year, India's merchandise exports to the US stood at USD 83.77 billion, while imports were USD 40.12 billion, leaving a trade gap of USD 43.65 billion in favour of India.

The country's services exports to America were USD 36.33 billion in 2023. *—ANI*

FOOD SUBSIDY ACCOUNTS FOR OVER 50% OF TOTAL GOVT SUBSIDY

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

The food subsidy has been the largest component of the government's total subsidy expenditure so far in the financial year 2024-25, accounting for more than 50 per cent of the total amount disbursed.

According to a report by Bank of Baroda, the government spent Rs 3.07 lakh crore on subsidies during the first nine months of the financial year (April-December 2024). This is higher than the Rs 2.77 lakh crore spent in the same period last year but remains lower than the Rs 3.51 lakh crore spent in April-December 2022.

A major reason for this increase is the rise in food subsidy spending. The government allocated Rs 1.64 lakh crore for food subsidies during April-December 2024, which is higher than the Rs 1.34 lakh crore spent in the same period last year. However, it is slightly below the Rs 1.68 lakh crore recorded in April-December 2022.

According to a report by Bank of Baroda, the government spent Rs 3.07 lakh crore on subsidies during first 9 months of financial year PHOTO: X

The report also highlighted a decline in the government's non-debt capital receipts, which include revenue from asset sales and disinvestments.

These receipts stood at Rs 27,296 crore as of December 2024, lower than Rs 29,650 crore in December 2023 and significantly below Rs 55,107 crore in December 2022. This indicates weaker revenue collection and reduced success in generating funds through non-debt sources.

Additionally, the report also highlighted that the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into India have weakened. The report also noted an increase in foreign investor outflows from the Indian stock markets, adding pressure on overall inflows into country. *—ANI*

SIMPLIFIED TAX PROCESS

Income Tax dept activates section wise mapping of IT Act, bill

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

Income Tax payers can now match the sections of the I-Tax Act, 1961, with the corresponding clauses in the simplified I-T Bill, 2025, on the tax department portal.

Also, Section to Section mapping as per Income Tax Act, 1961 and Section number as per New Income Tax Bill has been uploaded on the I-T department's website.

A simplified Income Tax Bill, 2025, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on February 13 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The Bill, once enacted, will replace the 64 years old Income Tax Act which has become bulky over time with its traditional style of drafting and numerous amendments.

The simplified Bill has a word count of 2.6 lakh, lower than 5.12 lakh in the I-T Act. The number of Sections is 536, as against 819 effective sections in the existing law.

The number of chapters also have been halved to 23 from 47 currently. The Bill has 57 tables, compared to 18 in the existing act, besides formulae which make it easier for a taxpayer to calculate tax liability. It has removed 1,200 provisos and 900 explanations.

In a post on X, the department on February 14 said it has activated the utility to check Section of the Income Tax Act, 1961, vis-a-vis corresponding clause of the new Income Tax Bill. A taxpayer can select the section of I-T Act, 1961, from a drop down menu and accordingly the corresponding clause in the I-T Bill will appear.

A simplified Income Tax Bill, 2025, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 13 February by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman PHOTO: FREEPIK

Besides, a section wise mapping has been given in tabular format for taxpayer convenience.

The Bill uses shorter sentences and has been made reader-friendly with the use of tables and formulae. Tables have been provided for provisions relating to TDS, presumptive taxation, salaries, and deductions for bad debt .

The Bill introduces a new concept of 'tax year' as the 12-month period beginning from April 1. This would replace the present concept of assessment and previous year. Currently, income earned in the previous year (PY) say in the year April 2024 to March 2025 will be assessed in assessment year (AY) 2025-26.

The Bill will come into effect from 1 April, 2026, after it is vetted by a Select Committee of the Lok Sabha and cleared by Parliament.

- The simplified Bill has a word count of 2.6 lakh, lower than 5.12 lakh in the I-T Act. The number of Sections is 536, as against 819 effective sections in the existing law

Also, the word 'notwithstanding', which was used excessively in the Income Tax Act, 1961, has been done away with in the new Bill and almost everywhere replaced with the term 'irrespective'. *—PTI*

PHOTO:ANI

Odisha announces cash prize for Nat'l Games winners

BHUBANESWAR, 15 FEB

The Odisha government has announced substantial cash prizes for athletes from the state who excelled at the 38th National Games in Uttarakhand, which concluded on February 14. Odisha athletes won a total of 46 medals: 14 gold, 15 silver, and 17 bronze, placing the state 12th in the final rankings. Gold medalists will receive Rs 6 lakh, silver medallists Rs 4 lakh, and bronze winners Rs 3 lakh, as stated by Odisha Sports Minister Suryabanshi Suraj. The event featured 302 athletes representing Odisha, with standout performances from sprinter Animesh Kujur and gymnast Rakesh Patra. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

Bologna wins over Torino after last-minute goal

BOLOGNA, 15 FEB

A last-minute own goal from Cristiano Biraghi on his debut for Torino gifted Bologna a dramatic 3-2 victory in Serie A on Friday. With mere seconds remaining, a retreating Biraghi inadvertently sent the ball past his own goalkeeper, sealing a regrettable first appearance for the defender from Fiorentina. The defeat marked Torino's first loss in eight matches, ending a streak of six draws and one win since a shaky period at the end of 2024. The match at Stadio Renato Dall'Ara featured a standout performance from Dan Ndoye, who scored twice, while Eljif Elmas had given Torino a brief lead in the second half. Bologna's win elevated them to seventh place, leaving Torino in 11th. *—PTI*

Duplantis sets pole vault record at ISTAF Indoor

BERLIN, 15 FEB

Pole vaulter Armand Duplantis set a new meeting record on his return from a winter break by jumping 6.10 meters at the ISTAF Indoor meet in Berlin on Friday. The Swedish star attempted to beat his own world outdoor record set in Chorzów, Poland last August with two attempts at 6.27, but it was too high this time for the 25-year-old who broke the outdoor record three times last year. The second time was when he won his second Olympic gold medal with a record jump of 6.25 in Paris. He extended the world outdoor record by a centimeter to 6.26 in Poland on 25 August. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

Draw undermines Leipzig's League qualifying hopes

AUGSBURG, 15 FEB

Leipizig missed a chance to boost its hopes of a Champions League place next season when it could only draw at mid-table Augsburg 0-0 in the Bundesliga on Friday. The fourth draw in the last five league games for the Red Bull club left it in fourth place, two points behind Eintracht Frankfurt. Augsburg, meanwhile, remained 12th. Neither side was able to get a grip on the game and clear-cut chances were few but Augsburg would be happier with the point in a battling display in its first home match after three consecutive away games. *—PTI*

Kohli & Rohit in focus as India departs for CT

Jasprit Bumrah-less India will open their campaign against Bangladesh on 20 Feb

MUMBAI, 15 FEB

Dressed nattily in a white T-shirt and black tracks, Rohit Sharma got down from his car, and walked towards his teammates at the departure lounge amid loud calls of 'Rohit bhai' and 'Rohit sir' by fans waiting near the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport entrance.

Most of the squad members arrived in the team bus including head coach Gautam Gambhir, vice-captain Shubman Gill and star batter Virat Kohli and the stars obliged some fans by signing autographs or waving at a few of them.

Soon, the team boarded an afternoon flight to Dubai for the upcoming Champions Trophy amid heightened optimism of netting another global trophy after winning the T20 World Cup last June.

A Jasprit Bumrah-less India will open their campaign against Bangladesh on 20 February in Dubai before the much-anticipated blockbuster against traditional rivals Pakistan 23 February, and then the Men in Blue will take on New Zealand on 2 March to round off their league engagements.

The confidence -- of the fans and the team -- has been boosted by India's recent 3-0 ODI series whitewash at home over England.

Those supporters assembled at the Mumbai airport will be hoping that the icons led by Rohit and Kohli will pull off another triumph like they did in the West Indies last year.

Few months ago, Hardik Pandya had walked out with the T20 World Cup trophy hoisted on his shoulders to join a sea of passionate fans on the streets near the Wankhede Stadium for an open bus parade.

A big promotion came young Gill's way when he was named the ODI vice-captain, and the batter who averages nearly 61 in the format will be keen to stamp his authority with a fruitful outing in the Champions Trophy.

A coming together of all these factors will determine whether India will touch back in Mumbai as a boisterous winning group sometime next month.

Till then fans can immerse themselves in joyous optimism. *—PTI*

Shreyas Iyer: India's middle-order hustler and calming element

BENGALURU, 15 FEB

Shreyas Iyer is fidgety at the crease, almost Steve Smith-like. He keeps swinging the bat up and down against pacers, and walks across the stumps against the spinners. He often adopts different stances too.

It gives his batting a touch of restlessness. But behind that exterior disquiet, works a steady, calculative brain focused on finding run-making ways, and it will be India's biggest asset going into the Champions Trophy.

India will have varied threats to negate in the ICC showpiece's league stages — spin from Bangladesh and New Zealand and pace from Pakistan.

In No. 4 Shreyas, India has the best possible candidate for that job.

His control against off-spinners touches 90.2%, but he was dismissed four times by them.

Shreyas has not played much against Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf, but has taken 29 runs out of them in two matches at an average of 50.

He has an overall strike-rate of 102.49 in ODIs.

—PTI

Gukesh loses to Firouzja, ends last in Freestyle play-off

HAMBURG, 14 FEB

World champion D Gukesh finished last after losing to Iranian-French grandmaster Alireza Firouzja in the second game of their seventh-place playoff match at the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam here.

Gukesh thus concluded his forgettable campaign in the tournament at Weissenhaus resort without a single win.

After a lost battle that ended in a draw on the first day, the ball was in Gukesh's court to do well as the white pieces, but clearly, the world champion had run out of steam to lose in 30 moves.

The test of time started in the middle game when Gukesh made a mistake and had to part with his queen for two pieces. While Firouzja made good use of his material advantage.

PHOTO: X

Meanwhile, local favourite Vincent Keymer won the first edition despite being touted as a rookie at the start.

Pre-tournament favourite Magnus Carlsen won his second game on the trot at the expense of Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan – the other big find of the tournament.

Sindarov had gotten in after the withdrawal of Viswanathan Anand and proved himself more than worthy of the invite by reaching the Semis.

However with Carlsen on song, the Uzbek did not stand a chance and was punished for the second day in a row by the world's best player. *—PTI*

AMID WFI'S FAILURE

Wrestlers seek minister's nod for Albania event

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

Indian wrestlers, including Asian champion Sunil Kumar and U-23 Asian Championship gold medallist Minakshi, appealed to Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya for intervention to secure approval for their participation in the upcoming Ranking Series in Albania. The tournament is set to take place in Tirana from 26 February to 2 March, but the Ministry has withheld permission due to the Wrestling Federation of India's (WFI) failure to submit necessary recommendations on time.

Gathering outside Mandaviya's residence on Saturday, the wrestlers expressed their frustration. "We are unable to participate, and we came here to request the minister to allow us entry," Kumar stated, noting that competing in Albania is crucial for their preparation ahead of the Asian Championship in Amman in March.

Despite waiting until 2 PM, the minister was unavailable, leading Minakshi to emphasise the lack of communication: "We don't know the reason for this obstruction."

Competing in these series is essential for Indian wrestlers to earn points and secure favourable seedings at World Championships. *—PTI*

Brighton overwhelms Chelsea with 3-0 win

BRIGHTON, 15 FEB

Brighton secured a league and cup double over Chelsea, defeating the London side 3-0 at the Amex Stadium on Friday, just a week after their 2-1 FA Cup win. Kaoru Mitoma opened the scoring in the 27th minute, skillfully controlling a long ball from goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen before slotting home.

Eleven minutes later, Mitoma's determination led to Yankuba Minteh doubling Brighton's lead after a defensive lapse.

Minteh added his second and Brighton's third in the 62nd minute, following a slick one-two with Danny Welbeck as Chelsea's defence faltered again. *—PTI*

Aditi Ashok
PHOTO: PTI

Aditi lone Indian to make cut at Saudi Int'l

RIYADH, 15 FEB

Aditi Ashok was the only Indian player to make the cut at the PIF Saudi Ladies International, carding an even-par 72 in the penultimate round at Riyadh Golf Club. Her score of 3-under for 36 holes placed her in a tie for 33rd, qualifying her among the top 60 and ties for the final round.

In contrast, fellow Indians Pranavi Urs (70-73), who ended at 1-under, along with Diksha Dagar (75-69) and Tvesa Malik (73-73), all failed to progress, missing out as the cut fell at 2-under 142.

Thailand's Jeeno Thitikul took the lead with a stunning 8-under 64 round, elevating her to 13-under-par and establishing a three-shot advantage heading into the final day. The world number four started strong with back-to-back birdies and capped her round with two more birdies.

In the standings, England's Annabel Fuller and Korea's Somi Lee are in joint second at 10-under-par, while Switzerland's Chiara Tamburlini and Austria's Emma Spitz share fourth at 9-under-par. Seven players, including Thailand's Ariya Jutanugarn and Australia's Steph Kyriacou, lie tied for sixth at 8-under-par. *—PTI*

India win against England in FIH Women's League

BHUBANESWAR, 15 FEB

A confident India began their campaign in the Women's Pro League with a 3-2 win against higher-ranked England at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium here on Saturday.

Two of India's goals came from penalty corners with Vaishnavi Phalke scoring the opener in the sixth minute and Deepika smashing the winner in the 25th, while Navneet Kaur smashed the winning goal with just one minute left in the game.

For England, Darcy Bourne took advantage of a huge defensive lapse to slot home the first equaliser in the 12th minute and then Fiona Crackles (58th) levelled things again before Navneet slotted home the winner a minute later.

Vaishnavi opened the account from India, ranked ninth in the FIH, after a firmly-struck shot from Manisha Chauhan off the first penalty corner hit a defender's stick and came back into play.

Fiona made it 2-2 with just two minutes remaining on the clock as the game headed towards a draw but Navneet came up with a goal on the counter-attack. *—PTI*

Gujarat Giants aim for redemption against UP Warriorz in WPL clash

Gujarat Giants will be aiming for an improved showing after suffering a six-wicket defeat against RCB on Friday
PHOTO: BCCI

VADODARA, 15 FEB

Following a heavy defeat in their season opener, the Gujarat Giants are eager to improve their performance as they face the UP Warriorz on Sunday in the Women's Premier League. In their previous match, the Giants set a lofty target of 202 runs, propelled by solid performances from Beth Mooney (56) and Ashleigh Gardner (79 not out). However, their bowlers struggled, failing to contain the Royal Challengers Bengaluru as Richa Ghosh struck a stunning 64 off just 26 balls, aided by crucial dropped catches.

The Giants will need to refocus and enhance their bowling and fielding strategies to turn their fortunes around. In contrast, the UP Warriorz will be led by new captain Deepti Sharma, following Alyssa Healy's withdrawal due to injuries.

The Warriorz boast a formidable spin attack, featuring England's Sophie Ecclestone and Australia's Alana King, while their batting line-up includes powerful talents such as Tahlia McGrath and Grace Harris. With a mix of young Indian players and seasoned internationals, UP Warriorz enter the match as favourites, presenting a challenge for the Giants. *—PTI*

ACCEPTANCE WITH WADA

Tennis star Sinner gets 3-month ban in doping case

LONDON, 15 FEB

Top-ranked tennis player Jannik Sinner has accepted a three-month ban in a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency over his two positive doping tests, the organisation said Saturday.

WADA, which was seeking to ban Sinner from the sport for at least one year, had challenged a decision last year by the International Tennis Integrity Agency not to suspend Sinner for what the ITIA judged was accidental contamination by a banned anabolic steroid last March.

Sinner's explanation — that trace amounts of Clostebol in his doping sample was due to a massage from a trainer who used the substance after cutting his own finger — had been accepted.

The 23-year-old Italian, who won the Australian Open in January, will be eligible to compete in the next Grand Slam. The French Open begins May 25.

WADA had originally appealed the ITIA's ruling to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne, Switzerland. It has formally withdrawn the appeal.

"WADA accepts the athlete's explanation for the cause of the violation as outlined in the first instance decision. WADA accepts that Mr. Sinner did not intend to cheat, and that his exposure to Clostebol did not provide any performance-enhancing benefit and took place without his knowledge as the result of negligence of members of his entourage," it said in Saturday's announcement.

On Friday, Sinner posted a video on Instagram of himself training in Doha at the Qatar Open, which starts next week.

Sinner could return at his home tournament, the Italian Open in Rome, which starts 7 May. *—PTI*

Jannik Sinner
PHOTO: X

Gulveer Singh smashes 3000m indoor Nat'l record

NEW DELHI, 15 FEB

Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medalist Gulveer Singh made a strong start to his season, shattering a 16-year-old national record in the men's 3000m indoor race at the BU David Hemery Valentine Invitational in Boston.

The 26-year-old Army runner clocked 7:38.26, finishing second in the event and surpassing the previous Indian record of 7:49.47 set by Surendar Singh in 2008.

Surendar now serves as a coach.

Buoyed by his impressive performance, Gulveer has now set his sights on securing automatic qualification for the 2025 World Athletics Championships in the men's 10,000m, where the entry mark is 27:00.00.

"I'm elated to have clocked a good time in my season's first Indoor race in Boston," stated Gulveer, who won bronze in the 10,000m at the Asian Games, in an AFI release.

In 2023, Gulveer set new national marks in both the 5,000m (13:11.82) and 10,000m (27:14.88) outdoor events.

Meanwhile, India's Rahul also competed in the 3000m indoor race, clocking 7:55.00, while Kartik Kumar finished the men's 5000m indoor event in 14:04.67. *—PTI*